“You can’t pour from an empty cup. Take care of yourself first.” Constructing the self in online self-care discourse

Sannamari Kurki

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Faculty of Social Sciences

University of Helsinki

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HELSINGIN YLIOPISTO
HELSINGFORS UNIVERSITET
UNIVERSITY OF HELSINKI

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Tekijä – Författare – Author
Sannamari Kurki

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Tiivistelmä – Referat – Abstract

The topic of this thesis is self-care as currently discussed on social media. Research questions address what caring for the self consists of and why it is practiced, what kinds of selves are constructed in social media self-care discourse, and how self-care is discussed on social media. Data for the thesis was gathered on the social media site Instagram, where questions of wellbeing and self-care are avidly discussed. Data consists of observation on Instagram posts and their caption texts, conversations on comment sections and interviews with content providers. Self-care discourse is understood to be part of Western originating therapeutic culture and data was primarily from Anglophone countries and Europe. However, due to the global nature of Instagram as a social media, the research was not limited geographically. Interviewees were from North America and Europe. The thesis takes part in anthropological discussions of wellbeing. It is based on the assumption that discourse on wellbeing can provide insight into ideologies that are at play in societies and how they affect the individual.

Self-care is understood as part of therapeutic culture where psychological concepts are used to inform understandings of the self. Selfhood in self-care discourse is seen as a continuation of a Euro-American tradition, where the self is understood as a bounded individual. The background of current self-care practices is traced through how caring for the self was practiced in Antiquity and early Christianity, to the impact of Calvinist ideologies of work and American originating ideas of positive thinking and self-help. Empirical studies on self-help literature informed investigations and provided a comparative framework to self-care discourse. Two key ways of approaching projects on the self are discussed: a Foucauldian inspired governmentality-focused perspective, where cultivating personal wellbeing can be understood as a form of neoliberal governance, where individuals are governed through freedom of choice; and a perspective that emphasizes interpretation and agency in self-helping practices, and where self-identity can be understood as a reflexive project, where engaging in therapeutic culture is an avenue of self-making and may have emancipatory potential.

Mindset and practice are found as two key aspects in current self-care practices. Self-care is a practice but what determines something as self-care is the mindset it is done in. The self-care mindset is about a specific way of relating to the self. The self and relationship towards oneself are highly valued and the self is framed as a prime source of knowledge for the individual. Taking care of oneself thus entails listening to oneself, what the self needs, and acting accordingly in the practice of the self. Self-knowledge is a requisite for the practice of self-care, but increased self-knowledge was also the result of caring for the self. Caring for the self resulted in better awareness of the self and increased wellbeing, especially regarding mental health.

In self-care discourse the individual is understood as being embedded in social relationships and obligations. However, sociality is often presented more as a problem than a solution to individual wellbeing. Happiness and wellbeing are to be found within, not from others. There is an ethical duty towards caring for the self first. This was also framed as the best way to take care of others. Western society is seen as stressful, fast-paced and taxing. There are ample opportunities for people, but also a lot of information, responsibilities, and expectations in life, both at work and outside of it. Self-care is about living in this choice-laden world, with the solution of focusing on taking care of the self. Self-care is seen as benefitting all aspects of people's lives. These practices cannot be completely divorced from power relations. Caring for the self could be understood as a form of governance that produces responsible self-governing citizens. However, self-care discourse also includes social critique, where societal norms around mental health and women's roles are questioned and attempted to alter by sharing personal narratives, information, quotes, advice, and reminders on social media. Self-care discussions are understood as an arena for life politics, a politics of lifestyle choices. In the self-care lifestyle caring for the self before others, rest, and vulnerability are valued.

The thesis argues that Instagram self-care discourse is an avenue for self-making. Through sharing personal narratives, Instagrammers construct their self-identities. Life is understood as a journey that has its ups and downs, and sharing all aspects of life on social media is a way to counter narratives of an ideal person and especially woman who is always productive, a view that society is seen to generate. An ethical way of life is about taking care of and loving oneself first, which generates wellbeing to the self and others.

Avainsanat – Nyckelord – Keywords
self-care, social media discourse, Instagram, selfhood, wellbeing, therapeutic culture, good life

HELSINGIN YLIOPISTO
HELSINGFORS UNIVERSITET
UNIVERSITY OF HELSINKI

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Tutkielman aiheena on keskustelu itsestä huolehtimisesta osana hyvinvointia sosiaalisessa mediassa. Tutkimuskysymykset käsittelevät itsestä huolehtimisen tapoja, miksi sitä harjoitetaan, miten siitä keskustellaan sosiaalisessa mediassa, ja millaista minuutta näissä keskusteluissa rakennetaan. Tutkimuskenttänä oli sosiaalisen media sivusto Instagram, jossa keskustellaan vilkkaasti hyvinvoinnista ja itsestä huolehtimisesta sen osana. Tutkimukseen kuului tiedon kerääminen Instagram-julkaisuista, niiden kuvateksteistä ja haastatteluista sisällöntuottajien kanssa. Keskustelu itsestä huolehtimisesta ymmärretään osana länsimaista lähtöisin olevaa terapeuttista kulttuuria ja data oli lähinnä englanninkielisistä maista ja Euroopasta. Tutkimusaihetta ei rajattu maantieteellisin perustein, sillä Instagram on globaali sosiaalinen media. Haastateltavat olivat Pohjois-Amerikasta ja Euroopasta. Tutkielma ottaa osaa antropologiseen keskusteluun hyvinvoinnista. Pohjaoletus on, että hyvinvointidiskurssi voi paljastaa yhteiskunnassa vallalla olevia ideologioita ja miten ne vaikuttavat yksilöön.

Itsestä huolehtiminen nähdään osana terapeuttista kulttuuria, jossa psykologisia konsepteja käytetään minuuden ymmärtämiseen. Minuus keskusteluissa itsestä huolehtimisesta ymmärretään osana euroamerikkalaista perinnettä, jossa ihminen ymmärretään rajattuna yksilönä. Nykyisten itsestä huolehtimisen tapojen tausta nähdään olevan antiikin ja varhaisen kristinuskon aikaisessa itsestä huolehtimisen perinteessä, kalvinismin vaikutuksissa työnteon kulttuuriin, ja USA:sta lähtöisin olevassa positiivisessa ajattelussa ja self-help -kirjallisuudessa. Self-help -kirjallisuuden empiirisiä tutkimuksia käytettiin taustana ja vertailukohtana itsestä huolehtimisen*, self-care*, tutkimiselle. Tutkielmassa käsitellään kahta pääasiallista tapaa tutkia minuuteen liittyviä projekteja. Ensimmäinen näistä on Foucault 'lainen hallinnan näkökulma, jossa henkilökohtaisen hyvinvoinnin kultivointi voidaan ymmärtää uusliberaalin hallinnan keinona, jossa yksilöitä hallitaan vapauden kautta. Toisessa näkökulmassa painotetaan tulkintaa ja toimijuutta. Identiteetti nähdään refleksiivisenä projektina, jossa terapeuttinen kulttuuri ja sen tuotteet voivat olla minuuden rakentamisen tapoja, joilla voi olla emansipoiva vaikutus.

Tutkielmassa havaittiin mielentilan ja harjoituksen olevan tärkeässä osassa itsestä huolehtimisessa. Itsestä huolehtiminen on harjoitus, mutta mikä tekee toiminnasta itsestä huolehtimista on mielentila, jossa se tehdään. Tähän mielentilaan liittyy tietynlainen suhtautuminen itseen. Minuus ja oma suhde itseen on korkealle arvotettu ja minuus nähdään yksilölle tärkeänä tiedonlähteenä. Itsestä huolehtimiseen kuuluu itsen kuuntelu ja itsestä huolehtiminen omien tarpeiden mukaisesti. Itsetuntemus on tärkeää, jotta voi huolehtia itsestä, mutta lisääntynyt itsetuntemus on myös seuraus itsestä huolehtimisesta. Itsestä huolehtiminen johtaa parempaan ymmärrykseen itsestä ja lisääntyneeseen hyvinvointiin, etenkin parempaan mielenterveyteen.

Keskustelussa itsestä huolehtimisesta yksilö ymmärretään osana sosiaalisia verkostoja ja velvollisuuksia. Sosiaalisuus kuitenkin esitetään enemmän ongelmana kuin ratkaisuna henkilökohtaiselle hyvinvoinnille. Onnellisuus ja hyvinvointi löytyvät itsestä, eivät muilta. Ihmisellä on eettinen velvollisuus huolehtia itsestään ensin, mikä nähdään myös parhaana tapana huolehtia muista. Länsimainen yhteiskunta nähdään stressaavana ja nopeatempoisena. Ihmisille on tarjolla paljon tilaisuuksia, mutta myös paljon tietoa, velvollisuuksia ja vaatimuksia niin työ- kuin yksityiselämässä. Itsestä huolehtiminen on ratkaisu elämiseen tässä valintojen täyttämässä maailmassa ja sen nähdään vaikuttavan kaikkiin elämän osa-alueisiin. Valtasuhteita ei voi jättää huomioitta hyvinvoinnista huolehtimisesta puhuttaessa. Itsestä huolehtimisen voi ymmärtää hallinnan keinona, joka tuottaa itsehallinoivia, vastuullisia kansalaisia. Toisaalta keskusteluun itsestä huolehtimisesta liittyy myös sosiaalista kritiikkiä. Yhteiskunnallisia normeja liittyen mielenterveyteen ja naisten rooleihin kyseenalaistetaan ja yritetään muuttaa jakamalla henkilökohtaisia tarinoita, tietoa, lainauksia, neuvoja ja muistutuksia sosiaalisessa mediassa. Keskustelut itsestä huolehtimisesta voi nähdä areenana elämän politiikalle, jossa elämäntavan valinta on tapa vaikuttaa. Itsestä huolehtimisen elämäntapaan kuuluu itsestä huolehtiminen ennen muita, lepo ja kaikkien elämän vaiheiden ja tunteiden hyväksyminen.

Tutkielmassa argumentoidaan, että Instagram-diskurssi itsestä huolehtimisesta on minuuden rakentamisen tapa. Sosiaalisen median toimijat rakentavat identiteettiään jakamalla henkilökohtaisia narratiiveja. Elämä ymmärretään matkana, jossa on ylä- ja alamäkensä, ja elämän kaikkien puolien jakaminen sosiaalisessa mediassa on tapa vastustaa narratiiveja ideaalista aina produktiivisesta ihmisestä ja etenkin naisesta, jota yhteiskunnan nähdään luovan. Eettiseen elämään kuuluu itsestä huolehtiminen ja itsen rakastaminen ennen muita, joka luo hyvinvointia niin itselle kuin muille.

Avainsanat – Nyckelord – Keywords
itsestä huolehtiminen, hyvinvointi, sosiaalisen median diskurssi, Instagram, minuus, terapeuttinen kulttuuri, hyvä elämä

Contents

1. Introduction

The concept of *self-care* has in recent years become a much-repeated notion in Western wellness culture. Wellness as a descriptor for good health and wellbeing has itself become a mainstream concept in Western societies. It is something that can be integrated into all aspects of life and is sought in various ways. (Cederstöm and Spicer 2015:3, 5–6.) Currently seeking personal wellbeing is often articulated through caring for the self. Articles in The Guardian and NPR connect the current self-care phenomenon especially to millennials, with headlines sporting phrases such as "generation treat yo' self" and "the millennial obsession with self-care" (Silva 2017; Mahdawi 2017). Both articles mention French philosopher Michel Foucault, who wrote that caring for the self was for the Ancient Greeks an ethical practice that creates good citizens, capable of taking care of themselves and others, and American writer and activist Audre Lorde who in 1988 wrote that "caring for myself is not self-indulgence, it is self-preservation and that is an act of political warfare." (Silva 2017; Mahdawi 2017.) Arwa Mahdawi writes in the Guardian that contrary to the Greeks and the spirit of Lorde's proclamation: "Rather than being a route to social change, self-care has become a destination in itself." (Mahdawi 2017.) Similar thoughts have been voiced in the social sciences, where this focus on the self and personal wellbeing has been studied for instance in the context of self-help manuals that advise people in living their lives in ways that are centered on self-work, autonomy and self-responsibility, and offering individual solutions to potentially social problems.

Information on self-care is widely distributed on the internet. A simple Google search with the term self-care brings up 3,38 billion results (16.6.2020). In a 2015 study it was revealed that for American community college students the internet was the most consulted source for information on health, including self-care, nutrition, fitness and alternative therapies (Rennis et al. 2015:414). On the social media site Instagram, the site of research for this thesis, the hashtag #selfcare brings up 29,3 million posts (11.6.2020). At the time of writing my preliminary research plan for this thesis in the spring of 2018, the same hashtag generated 5,28 million posts. This multiplication isn't necessarily only to do with a radical increase in interest in self-care but is also about the way self-care has become a buzzword to hashtag in any image on Instagram. There is, however, a deeper aspect in the current self-care phenomenon that was articulated by my interviewees and the Instagram posts and discussions I observed.

My academic interest in the self-care phenomenon began with noticing the phrase "self-care" as increasing in my social media feeds, especially on Instagram. It increasingly came up not only on wellness-related accounts, but as a concept that was repeated by many. This sparked my interest in the meaning of self-care; what is it and why is it suddenly repeated in various media as something people should do. In short, I asked myself - why self-care? Looking into wellness and therapeutic culture and the development of these concepts related to wellbeing and self-improvement raised more questions. What are the reasons for cultivating personal wellbeing in current societies? Is it conceived of as an ethical act that is for the betterment of society, as for the Greeks in Antiquity? Or is it, again in Foucault's terms, a form of governmentality where individuals are made responsible for their own health and wellbeing, while health services at a societal level are being diminished, and current work life is so demanding that it is necessary to cultivate wellbeing simply in order to keep up?

Since the internet is such a prominent source of information and an avenue of communication for people, and I knew that self-care is avidly discussed on social media, I decided to use the social media site Instagram as a site for my explorations into these questions. Beginning fieldwork in the Spring of 2019, I used internet ethnography to look into self-care – what it is, why is it practiced, and how is it discussed. In the course of the research and through getting acquainted with research on self-help reading, I became especially interested in the selfhood self-care discourse produces.

As already alluded to, a theoretical background and possibilities for analysis of the current online self-care discourse came from Foucault's works on care of the self in Antiquity and his conceptualizations of power and ethics, as well as how self-*help* discourse and wellness and therapeutic culture have been analyzed. I recognized two main branches of analysis regarding phenomena similar to self-care. First, a Foucauldian framework, where projects on the self are looked as a form of governance, where individuals are encouraged to govern themselves in ways that fit political programs of liberal democratic societies where freedom, choice and responsibility are valued (Rimke 2000:73). The theoretical section will begin with a chapter focusing on Foucault's concepts that are relevant to this thesis, such as *biopower* and *technologies of the self* and some definitions of ethics. The second chapter will the review how Foucault's thinking has inspired studies on current wellness and therapeutic culture, the first main branch of analysis mentioned, and trace the development of ideologies around

wellbeing. The second larger framework for looking at therapeutic culture is through a focus on agency and interpretation. Studies on self-help readers show that people interpret products of therapeutic culture in various ways, not necessarily taking in the whole message but adapting it to their circumstances. Practices focused on the self provide people with a sense of agency in their own lives and self-help reading brings a sense of community with others with similar experiences. Anthony Giddens is known for a view of therapeutic culture and self-help as "texts as our time", that can help people in their reflexive projects of self-making. (Giddens 1992:64). Since people do live in a society where individualism is prized and tradition loses hold, ways to live are increasingly questions of choice – lifestyle choices. Self-making is thus a reflexive project and therapeutic culture is one avenue of providing tools for it. (Giddens 1991:5.) This branch of research on therapeutic culture will finish the theoretical section of the thesis.

After reviewing research methods and ethical questions regarding the research, I will turn the focus to my findings on self-care. The analytical chapters of the thesis are divided into two larger wholes: how the self is understood in self-care, and relations of self and others in self-care discourse. The first whole will be focused on what self-care is and how the self is conceived of and constructed in self-care practices. The focus is on the relationship of "the self with the self" and what aspects of the self are emphasized in online self-care discourse. The second part will be about the relationship of the self and others. This includes how social relationships between individuals are framed, how others are viewed in self-care discourse, and how society is portrayed in self-care discussions. Focus is especially given to women, who are the main proponents of self-care. Lastly, the social media aspect of the thesis is discussed. The way Instagram works as a community for people immersed in "self-care culture" and how they communicate, as well as what opportunities for self-making online posting has, will be addressed.

In the final chapter of the thesis I will bring together ideas presented in the thesis and summarize what online self-care discourse can reveal us about the selves we strive to be and the societies we live in. Next, I present my research questions and discuss the relevance of studying caring for the self in anthropology – the gap in research this thesis will attempt to fill in the anthropology of wellbeing.

1.1 Research questions

What constitutes self-care in current social media discussions and why is it practiced?

What kinds of selves are constructed in social media self-care discourse?

- How are relationships between self and others, and society, framed?
- What kinds of ethical considerations underlie caring for the self?

How is self-care discussed on Instagram?

1.2 Anthropological relevance

The way concepts such as wellness or wellbeing, happiness and positivity, are talked about, can offer a look into the ideologies that are at play in our societies and how they affect the individual. These concepts are part of many people's lives and thus relevant to investigate. In talking of the nature of 21st century capitalism Kavedžija and Walker state that: "Western economies increasingly depend on psychological and emotional engagement with work and commerce, but find this ever more difficult to sustain in a context of rising inequality and alienation" (Walker and Kavedžija 2015:5). What in a Foucauldian view can be called technologies of the self – self-care, self-help, positive psychology – can be mobilized for economic efficiency. Kavedžija and Walker claim that anthropologists have contributed little to these debates on wellbeing and happiness. They note that: "There is a certain suspicion of happiness as an essentially bourgeois preoccupation, increasingly associated with a neoliberal agenda, and potentially at odds with emancipatory politics." (2015:5.) They believe that it is important for anthropologists to take part in cross-disciplinary discussions on wellbeing and happiness. The ethnographical method with its bottom-up approach has much to contribute to these debates (2015:6.) Kavedžija and Walker talk of happiness studies, but their thoughts strike a chord in looking at aspects of wellbeing and what is done to maintain it, such as self-care. With this thesis I hope to add to anthropological and cross-disciplinary discussions on what is seen to constitute a good life. Investigating people's ways of caring for the self and the reasons behind it, the discourse of what constitutes wellbeing in a certain corner of the internet, can reveal something about what we see as important in our relationship with the self as well as others.

Using social media as a site for ethnographical inquiry is relevant because of its prominence in current ways of communication, creation, information-seeking and entertainment. Analyzing social media content can help understand how social media users make meaning. The transnational sharing of text and images through for example Instagram is a significant communicational and textual practice. In their research on selfies on Instagram, Veum and Undrum base their study on "the fundamental idea of a mutual relationship between discourse and society and on the overall assumption that changes in discourse practices are an important indicator of wider social and cultural change", following for instance linguist Norman Fairclough (1992). (Veum and Undrum 2018:87.) This assumption is also at the base of my research into self-care discourse.

2. Theoretical framework and background

In this section I present my analytical framework for the thesis and some background on how discourse and techniques geared towards the self have been looked at in previous writing. To begin, a clarification of the conception of self that is used in this thesis is necessary. The way the self is looked at in self-care discourse stems from the Euro-American tradition. In the next chapters I will trace this concept of selfhood through the influence of Greco-Roman and Christian traditions as well as American originating self-help culture. When I speak of the self and selfhood, I will be talking of this "Western" concept of the self.

In anthropological thought it is clear that conceptions of personhood vary culturally (Smith 2012:50). Selfhood is thus understood to not be a stable unchanging thing, but something that is created "in the course of culturally patterned interactions" (Battaglia 1995:2–3). Debbora Battaglia asserts there is "no selfhood apart from the collaborative practice of its figuration" (1995: 2). Selfhood is thus seen in anthropological thought as practical knowledge that is embodied and is specific to a certain time and place (1995:3) Two larger categories of how selfhood is understood in different cultures are the individual and dividual conceptions of the self (Smith 2012:50). The Western concept of the self is an individual one. The individual refers to the person as singular and indivisible with some sort of core or spirit and is seen as being atomistic, an autonomous and egocentric social actor. Dividuality is characterized by its embeddedness in social relations, sociocentricity and determination by cultural systems and is seen as consisting of several dimensions that are independent yet interrelated.

(2012:53.) Such a division into individuals and dividuals has been criticized of being ethnocentric, contrasting Western individuals with non-Western "others" (2012: 60). However, here it suffices to say that in Western thought the self is usually understood as individual and indivisible (2012: 53).

A significant influence on the Western concept of the self has been psychological sciences (Rose 1999:xii). In this thesis I look at online self-care discourse as part of *therapeutic culture* where psychological knowledge is used in explaining various phenomena in modern society. (Salmenniemi and Pessi 2017:1.) Therapeutic culture is a based on the rise of what Nikolas Rose calls 'psy' sciences; psychology and affiliates. The development of these sciences has had a major role in how people in the Western world have conceived of themselves and acted upon themselves. It has led to the use of psychological conceptions as an everyday way of imagining the self. This way of looking at the self is, however, relatively new. Rather than seeing this psychological way of understanding the self as self-evident, Foucault and Rose remind us that it is one form of knowledge about the self, a form of knowledge the development of which can be historically traced. Psychological sciences and forms of power are also intertwined. Psychological thought has "had a very significant role in contemporary forms of political power, making it possible to govern human beings in ways that are compatible with the principles of liberalism and democracy" (Rose 1999:vii.) Psychological expertise has been used to manage people and normalize certain kinds of behaviors. Hospitals and prisons were created for those that don't fit these definitions of normal. 'Psy' sciences coupled with political power have created governable subjects. (1999: vii, viii, xi.)

However, building specific kinds of subjectivities can also be seen in interventions on the self that people take on voluntarily – such as caring for the self. These interventions on the self are value laden. Rose, as others interested in the consequences of therapeutic culture (e.g. Rimke, Salmenniemi) that is based on these 'psy' knowledges, see that the values behind current Western interventions on the self are those of autonomy, individualism and self-realization. People are 'obliged to be free'- life is conceived of as a trajectory of individual choices. (Rose 1999:ix.) Effects of larger circumstances, political decisions and social networks are effaced (Salmenniemi and Vorona 2014:45).

The connection between individual projects on the self and power has been famously analyzed by French philosopher Michel Foucault. His concepts of biopower, governmentality and technologies of the self still largely influence studies of self-making in the Western cultural context. A review of Foucault's key concepts regarding the self, ethics and power will begin this theoretical section. I will be drawing especially from Foucault's later works; his *History of Sexuality* series and the Collège de France lecture *Technologies of the Self*. Foucault's explorations on caring for the self in Antiquity will provide background on current self-care practices, as do his comparisons of the relationships between self-knowledge and self-care for the Greeks and in early Christianity.

The larger phenomena self-care is part of or affiliated with can be called wellness culture and the before mentioned therapeutic culture. In the second theory-focused chapter I will provide some background on the development of ideas behind current conceptions of wellbeing and how certain ways of thinking of the self and the surrounding world have become "normal" in this vein. The focus will be on critical views of wellness culture, where analysts see projects on the self as primarily a way for individuals to learn to govern themselves in ways that fit "the political programs of liberal democratic society", which produces individuals that are autonomous, responsible and self-regulating (Rimke 2000:72–73). Many of the studies reviewed have a Foucauldian framework and look at practices of the self as forms of neoliberal governance – creating subjectivities that are in line with neoliberal values of freedom, choice and responsibility. (e.g. Rimke). As examples I will be reviewing studies of self-help literature. Other examples of such therapeutic *technologies* could include techniques such as life coaching, mindfulness courses and self-tracking. (Salmenniemi et al., 2017: 1). Self-help is a useful example to mirror with self-care discourse because of the obvious connection – reading, interacting with text. The difference with online discourse is that posts on self-care in Instagram can be created by anyone, not an "expert" author as in self-help. However, the genre of self-help is also present in Instagram through quotes from self-help authors that are shared on various accounts. Self-care and self-help aren't synonymous though self-help reading can be a part of self-care.

I will then continue investigating therapeutic culture but changing the point of view to that of the audience. People use self-help texts in creative ways and don't necessarily

take everything a self-help author says without criticism. The studies reviewed in the third theory chapter look at how people interact with products of therapeutic culture. The focus of empirical examples will remain on self-help reading. The context of the person reading is important. A person can take in bits of advice from many different books and apply it to their specific situations. Even if the message of a self-help book aligns with neoliberal values, the lessons derived from it may be multiple. Anthony Giddens sees an emancipatory potential in self-help texts in that they can help people in reflecting on themselves in a time and society where the meaning tradition of has been diminishing. Self-making is reflexive endeavor and materials such as self-help can aid in this project. (Giddens 1991, 1992.) Further chapters introducing and analyzing my observations regarding self-care discourse will present arguments relating to both of these predominant views of therapeutic technologies - whether caring for the self merely produces self-governing individuals, or provides people a sense of agency in creating their visions of a good life in the choice laden present of modernity.

2.1 Power and ethics – Foucauldian conceptualizations

"As there are different forms of care, there are different forms of self", states Michel Foucault in *Technologies of the Self, a seminar with Michel Foucault* (Foucault 1988a:22). Foucauldian concepts of power and how projects on the self are immersed in power relations are relevant to discuss in any exploration of the concept of self in Western societies. Here I'm interested mainly in Foucault's later works on the technologies of the self, "the interaction between oneself and others and in the technologies of individual domination, the history of how an individual acts upon himself in the technology of self." (1988a: 19.) Self-care practices can be looked at as technologies of the self, where individuals implement certain operations on their selves to transform themselves for the attaining of wellbeing and happiness (Foucault 1988a:18). This chapter brings to light questions of ethics and power that are relevant in discussing the cultivation of personal wellbeing.

Foucault defined the problematic he investigated throughout his career as attempting to discover "how the human subject entered into games of truth" – these games of truth being for instance in the form of science or to be found in practices of control (Foucault 1988b:1–2). His investigations focused on "three modes of objectification which transform human beings into subjects": the modes of inquiry of science – be it economics or biology, "dividing practices" – dividing people into mad and sane, or

criminals and law-abiding, and finally, the ways a person turns oneself into a subject – which is what the focus of this thesis on (Foucault 1982:208).

Individuals are "made subject" through a power that governs through constructing a specific identity (Markula 2004:304). Foucault defines the subject as having two meanings: "subject to someone else by control and dependence, and tied to his own identity by a conscience or self-knowledge. Both meanings suggest a form of power which subjugates and makes subject to." (Foucault 1982:212.) Foucault's earlier works concentrated on games of truth in institutionalized power and domination, such as that in prisons or mental institutions - objectifying the self through scientific investigation and dividing practices, the first two forms of objectification (Martin, Gutman, and Hutton 1988:3). In his later works Foucault moved from these coercive practices to focusing on the third mode of objectification "the practices of self-formation of the subject" (Foucault 1988b:2). In this chapter I will trace out Foucault's concept of technologies of the self – these practices of self-formation, the ways these practices are related to ethics, power relations and other people, and the ways they manifested in practices of caring for the self for the Greeks and Romans in Antiquity, as well as early Christianity. Thus, this chapter will present some background for "Western" care of the self and ideas surrounding it, as well as theoretical formulations of how practices on the self are immersed in ethical valuations and power relations.

Biopower

In his three-part series *History of Sexuality* Foucault "traced how the modern deep self was constructed within the games of truth between coercive practices and practices of self-formation that individuals used to understand themselves as human beings" (Markula 2004:304). The first volume of the series, *The Will to Knowledge*, focused on the ways discourse on sex and the forms of power that relate to it have affected individual behavior. (Markula 2004:304.) The timeframe is in Western societies from the 17th century onward. Foucault summarized his object as defining "the regime of power-knowledge-pleasure." (Foucault 1990:11.) He uses discourse on sex as a way to scope out the ways power influences individual beings, turning them into subjects (Markula 2004:304). In this first volume he traces out his concept of *biopower*, a form of power that operates not through coercion but through "the administration of bodies and calculated management of life" (Foucault 1990:140).

Previously, a sovereign's power was in his right to determine life and death, which Foucault elaborates as "the right to *take* life or *let* live.". The ruler could decide to go to war and thus risk his subjects – "expose their life", or if his laws were disobeyed, he could have the offender be put to death. (Foucault 1990:135–36.) Today, power is manifested in living; in its maintaining, developing, administering, optimizing, and controlling (1990:136-7). There is now "a power to *foster* life or *disallow* it" (1990:138). Disallowing life is done in the name of the safety of society. Those who represent a threat to others can be punished (1990:138). Wars are still fought, of course, but they aren't fought for the sovereign, they're fought for the whole population (1990:137). This new form of power over life is what Foucault calls *biopower*. Biopower has two base forms over the individual. One form, or pole on a continuum in this power, is of the body as a machine that is part of the economic system. The other pole is in the body as a biological, reproductive entity. The first form is in using the body as a vehicle of production for the purposes of economy: efficient and optimizable, useful and docile. The second has to do with the biopolitics of the population. The population's health, mortality, births and life expectancy are overseen, controlled and intervened in. (1990:139.) Beginning in the classical period, management of life and administration of bodies was accorded into various disciplines and institutions, such as schools, universities, and barracks. Demography was developed, with statistics on populations and resources. This new biopower was essential for the development of capitalism, since bodies were made into machines of production and population development was crucial for economy, which needed to grow. Simultaneously social hierarchies were created with the uneven distribution of wealth. (1990:140-141.)

Before, disease and famine had meant that life was always under the random threat of death. But with the development of agricultural techniques and medical knowledge these threats became smaller. Power was wielded over life: "it was the taking charge of life, more than the threat of death, that gave power its access even to the body". Knowledge and power had the capability to transform life. (Foucault 1990:143.) The law also gave way to the importance of the *norm*. Law ultimately deals with death, at least as a last resort. But the norm is about regulating life. A normalizing power was manifested in medical and administrative institutions and other apparatuses – the law now worked more as a norm than a coercive threat. (1990:144.) A person now had a

right to health, happiness and development. This was something very different from the forms of power that were before. (1990:145.)

Foucault's thoughts on biopower have been very influential in research on therapeutic technologies, such as self-help. Psychological knowledge of the self has been seen as a vital part of neoliberal biopolitics, where 'psy' knowledge has been used to create self-governing subjects. (Salmenniemi 2017:614.) Liberal governance is about free, responsible, self-regulating individuals who govern themselves with the aid of therapeutic techniques. Self-help practices for instance can be thus conceived of as a way to govern and manage populations. (Rimke 2000:72.) Biopower is at work in the *living* people who have choices and rights to their lives. Norms of what constitutes a healthy and happy life regulate the behaviors of individuals. In self-care discourse there is discernable a certain negotiation of what constitutes healthiness and normalcy, especially regarding discussions on mental health. Self-care practices are individual and embedded in therapeutic culture and could be looked at as another way to produce self-governing subjects who fit values of Western neoliberalism. However, self-care discourse also promotes things such as rest, talking openly of mental health struggles and recovery, and in general messages of slowing down and reminding people that they can do nothing and don't always need to be productive. Another way to think of current self-care practices is that it is a way of building ethical subjects, which Foucault discusses in relation to technologies of the self in Antiquity.

Technologies of the self

The two other volumes in Foucault's history of sexuality, *The Use of Pleasure* and *The Care of the Self* concentrate on the analysis of practices of the self through the ways sexual activity was problematized in Antiquity (Foucault 1985:12). Foucault examined practical texts on day-to-day conduct that helped individuals "shape themselves as ethical subjects" (1985:13). *The Use of Pleasure* concentrated on the fourth century B.C. for the Greeks, while the last part (in addition a fourth part on practices in Christianity was planned but never finished) was on Latin and Greek texts of the first two centuries (1985:12). Foucault uses the genealogical method to map out "how the current deep self was historically formed through the understanding of desire." (Markula 2004:305.)

These ways one uses to form oneself as an ethical subject have changed over centuries (Foucault 1985:26). In Greco-Roman culture there was what Foucault calls the "arts of existence" – practices, techniques of the self men would use in order to transform themselves, making their lives into works of art (Foucault 1985:10–11). The underlying idea in the way these practices were to be used was moderation (1985:251). For the Greeks living a beautiful life through these "arts of existence" was what the moral code of conduct was based on. Following this code was the choice of the individual wanting to live a beautiful life. He would structure his life according to the code, using activities of self-formation Foucault calls ascetism, aspiring to self-mastery which was considered the highest form of moral being. In times of Christianity, it was divine law, not a personal choice of living a beautiful life, that was the reason to adhering to a moral code. (Markula 2004:305.) Foucault elaborates the meaning of morality in this context. A moral code refers to "a set of values and rules of action that are recommended to individuals" by various agencies, such as the church or family. (Foucault 1985:25.) Morality is also about the behaviors of individuals relating to these values and rules that are prescribed to them – this Foucault calls "the morality of behaviors" (1985:26-27). Self-forming activities for the Greeks changed into self-deciphering for the Christians. Self-examination in Christianity had as its goal purity of thought, the mark of the utmost ethical person. In modern society, the moral code of conduct is based on scientific, legal and religious norms. (Markula 2004:305–6.)

In *Ethical life, its natural and social histories* Webb Keane notes that in anthropology there is no consistent way to define the concepts of *morality* and *ethics,* and the two are often in fact left undefined. (Keane 2015:17). He brings up philosopher Bernard Williams' way of defining the two terms as useful, reviewing his ideas in his 1985 work *Ethics and the limits of philosophy*. Williams's definitions work well in the context of anthropology. He criticizes the Western philosophical idea that there are universal moral principles that need to apply to everyone, no matter what circumstances they are in. (2015: 17-18.) Williams calls this view that emphasizes a consistent system of obligations and blame "the morality system". The morality system is about rules and obligations and is based on principles that should apply to everyone. Ethics, however, is about a way of life as something that is constantly unfolding and varies corresponding to circumstances. Williams defines ethical life as something that is social in nature, that is shared among people. (2015: 18.) For Williams the morality system is one part of

ethics. (2015: 19) Keane goes on from Williams' critique of the Western morality system, proposing that there are multiple morality systems in cultures of the world. The histories of development of these morality systems then can be attempted to uncover, which is what Foucault is doing in tracing the ways of forming oneself as an ethical subject in different times. (2015: 20.) Williams' definition of the morality system (and Keane's extension of the term) is akin to what Foucault calls "the moral codes of conduct", a system of rules and values. Foucault's concept of "the morality of behaviors" is then closer to Williams' definition of ethics – something that people do in their lives. With these definitions in mind, I will later on discuss ethical questions that are embedded in current discussions of self-care and relationships with others.

Foucault detected the beginnings of the modern concept of the self in Greco-Roman philosophy of the two first centuries and in Christian spirituality of the fourth and fifth centuries (Martin et al. 1988:4–5). In his seminar *The Technologies of the Self* he investigates technologies of the self through examining writings on care of the self in ancient Greco-Roman and Christian traditions. (1988a: 21-22).

In examining how people have developed knowledge of themselves, Foucault identifies four types of "technologies": technologies of production, technologies of sign systems, technologies of power and

> …technologies of the self, which permit individuals to effect by their own means or with the help of others a certain number of operations on their own bodies and souls, thoughts, conduct, and way of being, so as to transform themselves in order to attain a certain state of happiness, purity, wisdom, perfection, or immortality (Foucault 1988a:18).

In each technology there is implied some sort of modification of people through acquiring specific skills and attitudes. The four types of technologies interact and don't usually function separately. They are also all linked to some sort of domination. Foucault calls the "contact between the technologies of domination of others and those of the self" *governmentality.* (Foucault 1988a:18–19.)

Caring for oneself and others

The practices Foucault examines are called *epimelestbai sautou* in Greek, meaning to "to be concerned, to take care of yourself" (Foucault 1988a:19). "To be concerned with oneself" was "one of the main principles of cities, one of the main rules for social and personal conduct and for the art of life" for the Greeks. Another, more known, moral

principle from antiquity was *gnothi sauton* - "know yourself", which is known as the Delphic Principle. (1988a:19.) "Know yourself" was a rule related to consulting the oracle and having to take care of yourself was always associated to it. Caring for the self led to self-knowledge. (1988a:20.) Foucault attributes the later prominence of "know yourself" compared to "take care of yourself" as a moral philosophical principal from antiquity to later Christian traditions. In the Christian moral tradition knowing oneself was the way to then renouncing the self, which is the condition for salvation. (1988a:22.) Knowledge of the self was needed to purify the soul, so one had to constantly scrutinize thoughts looking for temptations and sins (1988a:40). In this morality, the self is rejected through self-knowledge. With this background, taking care of oneself as a primary rule seems more immoral than as a basis for morality. (1988a:22.)

> We find it difficult to base rigorous morality and austere principles on the precept that we should give ourselves more care than anything else in the world. We are more inclined to see taking care of ourselves as an immorality, as a means of escape from all possible rules. (1988a:22.)

In addition, in Western secular tradition external laws are recognized as the base for morality. Here morals are to be found socially in interaction with other people. In theoretical philosophy knowing the self as a thinking subject was important in developing theory of knowledge. In summary: "In Greco-Roman culture knowledge of oneself appeared as the consequence of taking care of yourself. In the modern world, knowledge of oneself constitutes the fundamental principle." (1988a:22.)

Foucault begins his examination into care of the self in Antiquity with Plato's *Alcibiades 1*, which is the starting point for Plato's philosophy. It begins with "taking care of oneself" as the first principal. (Foucault 1988a:23.) In Plato's time concern for the self was related to young men in their formative years, preparing for political life. It entailed taking care of one's health and possessions and could mean caring for fields and cattle for a farmer or caring for the city along with its citizens for a king. One must take care of oneself in order to know oneself. Self-knowledge is the object of self-care. Political activities and self-occupation are linked. With self-knowledge comes the basis for being a just politician. (1988a:25-26.) Foucault cites Socrates saying how taking care of oneself is for the benefit of the city. For Socrates "teaching people to occupy themselves with themselves was teaching them to occupy themselves with the city". (1988a:20.) Care of the self was for the Greeks the requisite for being a true ruler. A ruler abusing

power was one who was a slave to his own appetites, and then imposed those desires or whims on others. A good ruler exercised power over himself and thus was able to regulate using power over others. (Foucault 1988b:8.) Caring for the self and thus knowing the self – what you can do and what you should do, what you should and shouldn't fear, what to want and not want and not fearing death – meant that one couldn't abuse his power over others: "To constitute one's self as a subject who governs implies that one has constituted himself as a subject having care for self." (1988b: 8, 13). The self that is taken care of is to be found not in the body but the soul. To know the soul, one must contemplate "the divine element", which is where "the soul will be able to discover rules to serve as a basis for just behavior and political action". (Foucault 1988a:25.) Later in the Hellenistic period the relationship between care of the self and political life is framed as a problematic – when is it better to retreat into oneself and away from political action? (1988a:26).

A man must govern his household and take a proper place in the community, as well as listen to his master's teachings. Even though self-care was at the base for ruling others wisely, care for the self was for the Greeks ethical in itself, not only through this caring for others. Foucault thinks that the relationship with the self and thus caring for the self always preceded caring for others. The pedagogical nature of self-care however made it not only a solitary practice, but a practice intertwined with relationships with others. (Foucault 1988b:7.) Those who knew more would tutor others in practices of the self (Foucault 1986:51–52). There were networks of schools and professionals, but also less official relationships of friendship and of kin (1986:52-53). Caring for the self was always linked to others in these webs of reciprocal obligations and was thus also a social practice (1986: 51, 54).

Caring for the self in early Christianity

In Christianity, there was a shift in the relationship between self-knowledge and caring for the self. Christianity is a salvation religion and a confessional religion. One must transform oneself in order to move to another reality, "from time to eternity". (Foucault 1988a:40.) For the Greek and Romans there was no life after death, except in the reputation one leaves behind. (Foucault 1988b:9). For Christians however, it was necessary to know the self in order to renounce the self. Caring for the self became "the renunciation of all that could be love of self, attachment to a worldly self." (1988b: 8.)

The new technology of the self in monastic Christianity was giving away one's one will to be completely obedient to one's master. Also, contemplation was highly valued as the absolute good. Christian monks would monitor and verbalize all of their thoughts in order to discriminate between good and bad thoughts. Good thoughts were those that led to God, whose contemplation was the goal. (Foucault 1988a:45–46.) Foucault relates that in Christian techniques of the self one had to renounce oneself in order to disclose, such as in sacrificing one's will and verbalizing all thoughts to one's master. Foucault stresses this theme of self-renunciation: "Throughout Christianity there is a correlation between disclosure of the self, dramatic or verbalized, and the renunciation of self.". (1988a:48.) Much later there was a shift in using techniques of verbalization in self-making:

> From the eighteenth century to the present, the techniques of verbalization have been reinserted in a different context by the so-called human sciences in order to use them without renunciation of the self but to constitute, positively, a new self. To use these techniques without renouncing oneself constitutes a decisive break. (Foucault 1988a:49.)

In the Greco-Roman world, as mentioned, all ethical thought was imbued with the thematic of care of the self. What is discernable partly with the advent of Christianity was this shift to seeing caring for the self as "something somewhat suspect". (Foucault 1988b:4.) Care of self came to be seen as something egoistic, a prioritizing of individual interests, which contradicted with the sacrificing of the self in Christianity and caring for others. (1988b:4-5). This background is visible in self-care discourse, where it is reminded that it isn't selfish to care for the self and that in order to care for others, one must take care of the self first. The later chapters will elaborate more on this interplay of the relationship between self and others and what constitutes ethical self-care in the current time.

2.2 Therapeutic and wellness culture – critical views

Foucault's conceptualizations of biopower and governmentality, 'government through freedom' as Rose puts it - the ways in which people voluntarily take on various projects on the self and the ideologies behind these projects are especially relevant today in the bloom of wellness culture. (Rose 1999:xxiii). Cultivating personal wellbeing is imbued with ethical considerations and is embedded in power relations. In this chapter I will review critical analyses on aspects of wellness and therapeutic culture in the Western sphere, such as the relationship between wellbeing and work, positive thinking, and self-help. These studies shed light on the relationships of power at work in projects on

the self and to what goals wellbeing is maintained. Foucault's conceptualizations of a normalizing power that is at work in creating self-governing subjects has been highly influential in investigating personal projects of wellbeing. Examples of messages self-help books transmit demonstrate this. Self-help techniques can be seen as a way for "individual self-management", that further certain ways of living that go together with ideals of liberal democratic societies (Rimke 2000:73). In self-care discourse there are aspects that seem to align with this idea, such as a focus on self-development, choice and individualism. However, this form of analysis where self-making is about learning values that fit neoliberalism is not necessarily the whole story when it comes to current self-care practices.

As reviewed in the previous chapter, Foucault spoke of the moralities that practices of the self are based on, such as the personal choice of building a beautiful life which was done by engaging in practices of self-formation for the Greeks. In the current time the foundation of the moral code of conduct is in scientific, legal and religious norms. (Markula 2004:305–6.) Sociologist Nikolas Rose has been influenced by Foucault's thought in his contributions to "a genealogy of the modern self", where he is concerned with the ways psychological knowledge has influenced the ways people conceive of themselves and act upon themselves (Rose 1999:vii, ix). Rose argues that this form of knowledge has created "governable subjects":

> "I suggest it ['psy' knowledge] has had a very significant role in contemporary forms of political power, making it possible to govern human beings in ways that are compatible with the principles of liberalism and democracy." (Rose 1999:vii).

These forms of power, in Foucault's term biopower, create certain kinds of subjectivities that are "capable of bearing the burdens of liberty". This is especially salient in current Western lives, where values such as self-realization and autonomy are commended. Rose argues that people are thus "obliged to be free". (Rose 1999:viii.) Individuals must create meaning in their lives "as if it where the outcome of individual choices made in furtherance of a biographical projects of self-realization", regardless of external circumstances (1999: ix). Critics of wellness and therapeutic culture see that this has created a situation where individuals are told to focus on themselves when difficulties in life are to do with wider circumstances in society (Cederstöm and Spicer 2015:6). When everything is a choice, it is also responsibility (2015:13). One area where this line of analysis has been employed is in examining the relationship between cultivating personal wellbeing and work life in Western societies.

Wellbeing and work

The relationship between work and private life started to change in the last decades of the 20th century. Where before there was division between the two, in the 1980's and 1990's work and private life started to blend. Employers began to demand increased productivity. Concurrently new technology such as cellphones and laptops made it possible to start taking work home. Barbara Ehrenreich notes that at this time being busy became a marker of status in American culture. If before the upper classes were divided from the rest by their time of leisure, now middle and upper classes would boast with their full schedules. New words were born to describe these new phenomena, such as "workaholic" and "multitasking". (Ehrenreich 2009:76.)

Ehrenreich sees the background of this appreciation of hard work in America in the Protestant branch of Calvinism, where idleness and seeking pleasure were sin. Self-discipline and labor were highly valued. (Ehrenreich 2009:75.) Perhaps the most well-known foundational work in this vein is Max Weber's sociological classic *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism,* where Weber perceives a link between modern capitalism, where wealth is acquired not only for material benefits, but for its accumulation for its own sake and Protestantism's concept of calling (Giddens 2001:xi–xii). Contrary to Catholicism and the monastic life it prized, Protestants believed the individual's moral obligation was fulfilling their duty in affairs of the world, in everyday life. Especially important in Weber's analysis was the doctrine of predestination in the sect of Calvinism, according to which God had predetermined a chosen number of individuals who would get to heaven, with the rest headed for damnation. (2001: xii.) Success in the world, in one's calling, was looked at as a sign that one was one of the chosen. This was according to Weber the moral justification and drive for accumulation of wealth by the capitalist entrepreneur. Success in worldly activity coupled with self-control and industriousness were thus highly valued. (2001: xiii.)

Ehrenreich argues that the background of the Protestant ethic is still visible today. However, now it is coupled with the ideology of positive thinking, where optimism is seen too bring material success. Since current capitalism is based on constant growth, positive thinking makes this perpetual growth seem possible. One must believe in one's own success for it to happen. But this also means that failure is the individual's fault.

(Ehrenreich 2009:8.) In regards to wellness culture more generally, Cederström and Spicer also state that there is a sense of everything being a question of choice for the individual, and when something is an individual choice, it also becomes an individual responsibility. This means that failure is not to be blamed on anyone except oneself. (Cederström and Spicer 2015: 13.) This, according to Cederström and Spicer, "provokes a sense of guilt and anxiety", since some things simply don't seem to be in a person's own control, such as finding a job in difficult economic times (2015: 6).

Techniques for wellbeing, such as life coaching, can thus be a way for the individual to have a say in their fate. Or, as Cederström and Spicer argue, taking responsibility for one's health can be framed as a "a necessary strategy to improve your personal market value" (Cederstöm and Spicer 2015:4). Workers that are healthy and happy are assumed to be more productive (2015: 4). Cederström and Spicer argue that due to this assumption, cultivating personal wellbeing has become a moral imperative in all aspects of life. The imperative for wellness is for the employed and unemployed alike. Cederström and Spicer relate the story of an unemployed man, who used self-tracking as a way to help him get a job in an ever more competitive labor market – not simply as a way to better personal health and happiness. A reason for partaking in wellness interventions is then related to "the uncertainties of the market, looming over the neoliberal agent as a foreboding cloud." (2015: 132.)

This need for wellbeing in order to be productive at work as well as get a job means that work and private life now blend even further than in the end of the 20th century that Ehrenreich described, where work could be brought home due to new technology (Cederstöm and Spicer 2015:132–33). Cederström and Spicer write that the spirit of the Protestant ethic has turned into "the workout ethic". Free time should be used to exercise and monitor one's health. Then again, working out is also done at work. Companies are increasingly founding health initiatives for their workers. (2015: 40.)

Rose also perceives a shift in how work itself is conceived of. If self-actualization was before something that was done in private life separate from work, now the ideal is to find self-fulfillment at work. Work came to be understood as a way to experience, produce and discover oneself. (Rose 1999:103–4.) Rose argues that the economic, social and psychological, blend in this vision of the self-actualizing worker. People could fulfil their social needs, as well as their potential for creativity through work.

Rose states that “working hard produces psychological rewards and psychological rewards produce hard work”. (1999: 119.) Now on to the work of self-monitoring in positive thinking.

Positive thinking

Ehrenreich sees the harsh worldview of Calvinism at the background of the phenomenon of positive thinking that started to bloom in the US in the 1950’s. A counterforce to the self-loathing self-examination and harsh Calvinist God that divides people into good and bad was first found in “New Thought”, a movement that began in the 1860’s. God in New Thought was the opposite of the Calvinist God: an all-powerful, ubiquitous Spirit or Mind. In New Thought man was no longer at the mercy of God’s choosing, but also actually spirit and thus one with God. In fact, all were of “One Mind” - a universal mind where everything is perfect and sin (if it existed) as well as disease were merely an “error”. Herein originates the idea that a person could cure their illness with the power of their mind, which was a genuine belief for some New Thought followers. (Ehrenreich 2009:79, 85.) The universal Mind or Spirit has limitless powers so by accessing these powers one could do anything (2009: 80).

The phrase “positive thinking” was popularized by Norman Vincent Peale who in 1952 wrote *The Power of Positive Thinking*, a staple to future self-help books. The New Thought movement was at the background of the this. (Ehrenreich 2009:89, 92.) The basic tenet of positive thinking is that thoughts must be monitored in order to weed out negative thoughts (2009: 90). Positive thoughts create a positive reality (Woodstock 2007:166). Ehrenreich notes that though the bases of Calvinism and positive thinking are quite opposite - one seeing people as inherently sinful and the other as inherently good - there is a striking similarity in the self-work both require. For Calvinists this was the fearful self-examination of looking for sin that would be a sign of damnation, for positive thinkers it is looking for negative thoughts in order to banish them. (Ehrenreich 2009:90–91.) As Ehrenreich describes it, this self-examination and self-work in the form of for example affirmations is never-ending. Falling into negativity must be noticed and combatted with constant self-scrutiny. And if goals are achieved, new ones must be made, since a person should constantly attempt to improve oneself. (2009: 94.)

Currently the idea of thoughts creating reality is best known as “the law of attraction”. This idea has a large following on Instagram, as I discovered during my fieldwork.

Posts such as “Abundance is coming. I deserve it. I accept it. Type YES if you affirm.” generated multitudes of “YES” responses. There are multiple Instagram accounts dedicated solely to the law of attraction. For example, the former quote is from a “law of attraction account” with 2 million followers (20.2.2020). These kinds of “affirmations” are also part of many self-help manual’s instructions. Often people are instructed to repeat certain phrases in order to help “reprogram” the mind from negative to positive (Ehrenreich 2009:93.) A similar term came up in my interview with Donna, an American self-care enthusiast, who told me that she is “rewiring” her mind. Donna brought up positivity, acknowledging that it is important to think positively. However, she also noted that all emotions are valid and part of human life. For her positive thinking meant letting herself be sad when the feeling arose, but then picking herself up and going forward, and trying to find something good in every day. The “extreme” form of positive thinking Ehrenreich writes of is different in that all negative thoughts and anxieties should be banished (Ehrenreich 2009:90–91). In Instagram positivity was especially discussed regarding mental health. Similarly to Donna, mental health posts about emotions would remind people that it isn’t always necessary to be positive and that all emotions are valid. Then again, some posts that came up during research would discuss how to cope with negative people. How positivity is framed has great variety in Instagram in general, but also in the self-care scene.

‘Neoliberal governance’ in self-help literature

One technique for developing the self is reading self-help manuals. A prominent vein in the analysis of self-help is through a Foucauldian framework, where the therapeutic techniques of self-help are seen as part of neoliberal biopolitics. Self-help is thus seen as a way of governing individuals in ways that produce specific kinds of subjectivities. (Salmenniemi 2017:614.) In this section I will look at these Foucault inspired studies, with the next chapter focusing on how readers engage with self-help discourse, concentrating on the multiplicity of interpretations and feelings of agency and community that self-help can bring readers.

Self-help as a category can encompass many kinds of ideas and advice, but in general self-help books are popular psychological books where readers are advised in relations with the self through usually psychological, spiritual and scientific discourses. Self-help is essentially advice on how to live one’s life. (Salmenniemi and Pessi 2017:2.) Louisa

Woodstock timelines three periods when self-help books have been especially popular. The first was in the bloom of the aforementioned New Thought movement in the late 19th century, then in the mid-20th century especially influenced by Norman Vincent Peale's *The Power of Positive Thinking* and lastly in "the contemporary scene, in which self-help has diversified, becoming a diffused, wide-ranging, and tremendously prosperous multimedia industry". (Woodstock 2007:171.) Part of this multimedia industry is currently social media. Self-help and self-care discourse have many similarities, most notably the focus on the self. Using self-help manuals as a frame of reference helps in teasing out the kinds of selves self-care discourse produces. Is self-care discourse creating a view of the self as self-sufficient individual, who takes care of oneself ultimately to sustain a societal status quo and thriving economy, or can caring for the self be seen as a radical ethical valuation, where one values oneself more than a taxing job or family obligations, and realizes through self-care their own potential to attempt to change social circumstances?

Like Woodstock, sociologist Micki McGee notes the significant rise in self-help book sales especially in the last decade of the 20th century. McGee connects this rising interest on improving the self with simultaneous economic strife. With unstable jobs and stagnant wages, diminished social welfare and lifelong jobs and even marriages increasingly rare, one must now work on keeping oneself employable and marriageable. This is achieved through self-improvement. This is the same argument Cederström and Spicer make in relation to wellness culture and work in general. Self-help book's advice in keeping oneself fit for work provide a safety net, when the social safety net has been increasingly wiped out. (McGee 2005:11–12.) Heidi Marie Rimke argues that self-help techniques are a form of governance where psychological models are used for the self-management of persons. This encourages certain ways of living that go well with "the political programmes of liberal democratic society". (Rimke 2000:73.) Rebecca Hazleden also asserts that the focus on the self and managing one's emotions in self-help is related to liberal democratic values (Hazleden 2003:413). Rimke says that:

> Self-help reading, from a historical perspective, constitutes one of the latest additions to a long and erratic psychocentric history of concerns surrounding the care of the self, wherein the self is simultaneously presented as a problem to be combated and as a potential paradise to be realized. (Rimke 2000: 73.)

When the answer to all problems is to be found in the self, outward manifestations of wellbeing such as a good job or successful relationship are actually a result of internal

wellbeing (Woodstock 2007:182). Self-discovery is often framed as searching for "the authentic self". This authentic self is framed in opposition to the socialized self that outside societal influences have corrupted. Societal institutions are generally framed as enslaving the individual, who with the help of therapeutic technologies described in self-help books can shed this harmful influence and find their authentic self. In this inward turn one's inner truth can be found. Searching for the authentic self is framed as an ethical responsibility. (Salmenniemi and Pessi 2017:5.) Hazleden notes that also in manuals that are geared towards (romantic) relationships, the problems readers attribute to their relationships, self-help authors point back to themselves. Issues in relationships are to be solved with first turning inwards, finding one's authentic self. Only then is a person ready to turn their attention to relationships. (Hazleden 2003:416.) This valuation of the relationship with oneself also came up in my research into self-care. The relationship of oneself with oneself is seen as the starting point for all other relationships. My interviewee Hannah said that the relationship with oneself should be most important, since that is the relationship that is there from beginning to end in one's life.

Therapeutic technologies that self-help manuals describe are used in self-work (Rimke 2000:70–71). Readers are diagnosed as having an unhealthy relationship with the self that self-help techniques can fix. Here the self-help writers 'psy'-authority is needed. There is a 'psychologized emphasis on the self'. The underlying idea is that a healthy relationship with the self is something that we've become separated from or forgotten. (Hazleden 2003:417.) Salmenniemi and Pessi note that the "authentic self" is framed as something that modern society has alienated us from. The problem of the self is something that has come about in post-industrial Western society. The ills of modern times burden the individual. Simultaneously there is a romanticized nostalgia for earlier, simpler times. (Salmenniemi and Pessi 2017:4.) So to reconnect with oneself, get to know one's authentic self, the expertise of a self-help author is needed. Rimke argues that in attempting to uncover the real self "what actually occurs is an artificial discursive and extra-discursive construction of the self". An authentic self is then constructed not by finding one's true self, but by learning the techniques towards self-discovery; "the self is a project and a product of a mastery of a discourse – a form of 'knowing how' rather than 'knowing that'". (Rimke 2000:70–71).Rimke argues that in the search for an authentic self, individuals actually self-fashion themselves into certain kinds of citizens

that fit the values of modern Western society (2000: 73). In the kind of individuality presented in self-help books the social world is seen as consisting of self-governing individuals (2000: 62).When everyone is focused on creating meaningful lives for themselves, "the horizon of social relations and the contexts of social power" is left unquestioned (2000: 65). Good citizens self-explore and govern themselves, but Rimke argues that the focus on the self negates citizenship that is based on social obligations. (2000: 72-3).

Pessi and Salmenniemi note that in some self-help books changing oneself is in fact presented as the way to change the world. The background of this is in the ideology of positive thinking, where thoughts are seen to create reality. Salmenniemi and Pessi's relate an interesting example of the way changing the self is seen to change wider circumstances in self-help discourse. They quote self-help author Eckhart Tolle, who states: "The pollution of the planet is only an outward reflection of an inner psychic pollution: millions of unconscious individuals not taking responsibility for their inner space." (Tolle 2010:78) Here a collective problem is framed as the fault of atomized individuals failing to take responsibility for themselves and make a personal change. Societal change is to be achieved by detaching oneself from others and reflecting on oneself, not by attempting larger change through political or civil society channels. (Salmenniemi and Pessi 2017:9.) As Rimke states: "Governing psychologized subjectivities through liberal political choice, freedom and autonomy ensures that norms of obligation, accountability and responsibility continually turn the subject back on itself." (Rimke 2000:72). Salmenniemi and Pessi attribute this turn towards oneself in order to combat collective issues to the state of current capitalism. Life seems to have become more uncertain and a general faith in societal institutions is diminishing, so perhaps the self-help ideal that a person can create their life with changing only themselves and starting to think positively is tempting.(Salmenniemi and Pessi 2017:9, 11.) Cook summarizes the idea of "neoliberal subjectification" thus:

> The way in which the subject relates to herself is both the symptom and the cause of neoliberalism: the symptom because anxiety and depression result from the uncertainty and individualism of neoliberal structure; and the cause because reflexivity and emotional regulation are necessary for neoliberalism to flourish (Cook 2016:178).

Self-help is an example of Foucault's idea of governmentality connecting "technologies of domination of others and those of the self" (Foucault 1988a:18–19). Self-help and

similar therapeutic techniques operate through the idea of freedom and choice in a positive manner. (Rimke 2000:63) Contrary to Rimke who asserts that the way the self and social world are framed in self-help negates citizenship, Hazleden argues that the emphasis on the individual in self-help discourse doesn't mean the social isn't taken into account. Hazleden sees that self-help and other psychological discourses produces a specific type of citizen capable of acting in the current public domain. The political is in the self-fashioning of individuals who learn to govern themselves. The ethical foundation is that looking after oneself before anyone else is the correct thing to do, both for the self and others. A healthy society operates through individuals capable of managing themselves and being responsible for their own conditions, detaching themselves from the circumstances of others. (Hazleden 2003:425.) Hazleden sees the relationship-focused self-help manuals she examined as neither emancipatory or oppressive, but as a way of shaping our ideas of the self and social (2003: 424-5). Hazleden's view strikes a chord concerning current self-care discourse. The social is not at all absent from discussions of self-care. Rather what is at work is a reframing of the social, especially in regards to women. Women are generally seen to be conceived through their roles as mothers and wives, but self-care discourse urges them to "take care of yourself *first*". An ideal mother for example, is no more one who sacrifices her own interests for her children, but who takes care of herself so that she can better care for her children. I will now move on to look at how self-help readers have used self-help in helping them construct new conceptions of the self and what kinds of lessons they have learned from this discourse.

2.3 Interacting with therapeutic culture – reflexive projects of self-making

In the former subchapter, I reviewed ways wellbeing and self-help literature have been studied from a governance-point of view. In studies focused on empirical research of self-help books, writers noted that the kind of self proclaimed in these manuals is independent, capable of changing oneself and whose inner truth or authentic self is the guiding principle in life. Life is a series of personal choices and choosing to be happy or have the life one wants is essentially the individual's responsibility. Other people are presented as a threat to the self that can sway one from the quest for the authentic self. Society is seen as more of a hindrance than a creator of possibilities, and changing things can be done through first changing the self. Political change is often framed as

difficult or ineffectual. Next, I want to add to these views, looking at studies that focus on people's actual engagement with self-help materials and studies of self-help that are also from other cultural contexts than the Anglophone world. These give a more nuanced account of how wellbeing and practices of the self can be looked at. It is important to remember the ways power is intertwined in cultivating personal wellbeing. But explaining therapeutic practices only through the spread of neoliberal values can be a totalizing argument that excludes the personal experience of people engaged in these practices. My interviewees described how their lives had been altered since they had started to practice self-care. They described a change in their attitude with themselves, being more aware of their needs and especially their mental health. As Larisa Honey says in her study of Moscow self-help groups: "Rather than denying the connection between self-help and neoliberal governmentality, the narratives expose a complementary repertoire of discourses and practices -- " (Honey 2014:26). I will now investigate these complementary narratives of self-help culture, which will aid in analyzing the relationship of discourse and experience in self-care discussions.

One of the first studies of audience interpretations of self-help books is by Debra Grodin, who in 1991 looked at how American women use and interpret self-help manuals in their everyday lives. Most studies thus far had analyzed only the content of self-help books (as the ones looked at in the previous subchapter). Grodin criticizes these approaches in that they often lean on the assumption that individuals passively take in, accept, the text they read. (Grodin 1991:407.) Looking at how people read and interpret what they read offers an important reminder: people make meaning based on their own circumstances and situations. The lessons learned from a single book may be different for each reader.

> The reader is not a passive recipient but a person with a life, who can use the books in various ways. We need to know what the bargaining is about, who is bargaining and why. (Hämäläinen 2016:299).

It is important to not just study the contents of cultural products but also how people take them in and interact with them. Hämäläinen critiques Rimke's Foucauldian analysis of self-help, where neoliberalism is presented as an explanatory category that rather than uncovers "the real life complexities of our contemporary framework of good personhood and practices of self-improvement", it in fact obscures people's experience. The reader is framed more as a victim of a social order than an agent in their own lives.

(Hämäläinen 2016: 295.) Ganti has criticized the abundant use of the concept of neoliberalism in anthropology in general. The benefit of the concept is that it permits comparing various ethnographic sites and subjects. But due to the concept's vastness as an analytical category, it can also cover ethnographic particularities and rule out other modes of inquiry. (Ganti 2014:89, 99.) Cook summarizes the limitations of neoliberalism in studying interventions on wellness thus:

> Recognizing the limits of neoliberalism moves us away from a conceptualization of neoliberalism as a totalizing ideology and allows us to explore the practices of people who recognize collective and structural causes of suffering at the same time as seeking practices of subjectification for improving wellbeing. (Cook 2016:176).

The self-help readers Grodin interviewed were selective in what they read and aware of their own possibilities for interpretation (Grodin 1991:410). Self-help text wasn't taken as truth but as guidance and suggestions that one could adopt if the advice felt right (1991: 411). Self-help was turned to for aid in personal problems in a time of changing social norms. Especially the older readers expressed their excitement in finding whole new way of looking at things in self-help books. They said that growing up in patriarchal society and with religion more a source of fear than solace, these books opened up new ways of thinking. Books that were liked were especially those with a message of self-reliance and autonomy. (1991: 409.) According to Grodin "Readers identified self-help as a site where one could encounter the message of possibility and self-direction." (1991: 410).

Self-help manuals provided women a resource in thinking of one's identity and relationships. (Grodin 1991:404). Manuals can help with changing social routines, such as dating or marital roles. Grodin calls this "the interruption of inherited social routines" were women can use self-help in improvising in new situations. One example Grodin cites is of an interviewee using a self-help book to understand the behavior of a man she was dating and then modify her own expectations of the relationship. (1991: 414-15.) In self-help reading the women were establishing a new sense of self. This could also mean extricating themselves from people, such as co-workers or family members, who were seen as purporting traditional roles for women that were now perceived as harmful by the readers. (1991: 416.) According to Grodin: "This need for separation from the past or aspects of the present may be one of the most pressing reasons for participating in self-help book reading." (1991: 415-16). Meanwhile there was a sense of community

with other self-help book readers. Some readers also participated in self-help groups, but also those who didn't talked of an imagined community of readers they felt affinity with. The perceived connection with other readers came from sharing a similar experience the self-help book made visible, such as being a child to an alcoholic or "a woman who loves too much". (1991: 415-416.) Now in addition to self-help book reading, social media offers limitless possibilities to find people with similar experiences one has had. Sharing one's experiences with others that have gone through something similar is easy in online communities. Sometimes strangers on the internet might understand better than one's own family or friends. This was visible in self-care discourse especially when it comes to mental health issues and mental illness. The stigma of mental illness can keep people from opening up about it to those near them and anonymous online environments can provide needed support.

Self-help in aiding to cope with times of social change is especially salient in a context where the social order has dramatically and suddenly altered. Suvi Salmenniemi and Mariya Vorona relate that self-help is a popular genre in today's Russia. After the collapse of the Soviet Union society went through massive changes, which was also mirrored in the arrival of new cultural forms. One of these new forms was self-help that introduced readers to a new psychological discourse on the self. (Salmenniemi and Vorona 2014:44.) In the Soviet Union psychological knowledge wasn't popularized in the same way as in the Western world. Self-improvement was important in the Soviet context, but the goals were very different than those of the individual-centered Western model. The "New Soviet Man" of those times "was be characterized by a heightened consciousness and a sense of social duty, sacrifice for the common good, and self-mastery." In creating these kinds of subjects, advice manuals and training regimes were harnessed to aid self-improvement and self-regulation. This sounds quite similar to the Western self-help sphere with its emphasis on self-work and management of emotions, as Salmenniemi and Vorona note. The ultimate goal was however different. (2014: 47.) In the Soviet model self-work was for the goal of common good, building the communist system, and manifested in concrete actions. In contemporary self-help individual happiness itself is the goal. (2014: 47-48.)

Western-originating self-help offered new ways of thinking about the self that were absent in Soviet times. Salmenniemi and Vorona's interviewees said that the kind of psychological way of looking at the self that self-help books are based on was new to

them. Readers said that “psychology” didn’t “exist” before. In Soviet times problems were framed and treated differently. Inter-personal issues were seen as collective and practical issues that the state disciplinary machine solved. Health wasn’t a personal concern. As one of Salmenniemi and Vorona’s interviewees says: “Well, we gave our health to communism. Our health was for somebody else, not for ourselves.” Health was conceived of in terms of physical health - a healthy body meant a healthy mind. Psychological issues weren’t framed as such. (Salmenniemi and Vorona 2014:50.) Self-help discourse was then a new form of knowledge. Problems were now seen as psychological issues that individuals should solve by themselves, with the aid of ‘psy’ expertise in the form of self-help books for example. After the collapse of the Soviet Union there was a need for getting accustomed to the rapid social change. Self-help provided one aid. Salmenniemi and Vorona’s interviewees associated Soviet times with predictability and stability. There wasn’t perhaps much choice, but there was also less responsibility. The current situation was seen as unpredictable and less secure. This called for new strategies of thinking and being. (2014: 49.) State regulation turned into individual problem solving and self-regulation (2014: 50).

With the collectivist socialist mentality in the background, it is no wonder that Salmenniemi and Vorona’s interviewees criticized especially certain aspects of Western originating self-help ideas. Such were the responsibilization of individuals without taking account for social aspects, goal-orientation, and a focus on materiality and pleasure as ways to happiness. (Salmenniemi and Vorona 2014:59.) Salmenniemi and Vorona also noted that interviewees had a skeptical attitude towards the universalizing manner of self-help books. They felt that Western-based ideals were being imposed as universal truths. (2014: 51-2.) Interviewees understood knowledge to be shaped by context, and certain ideas, such as the acquisition of wealth as a way to happiness, didn’t fit the Russian mentality. As Salmenniemi and Vorona say: “Our self-help readers engaged in the popular psychological discourse selectively, critically and ambivalently, and in an ongoing dialogue with other cultural frameworks”. Readers selected certain useful things from books but didn’t necessarily accept the entire message. It was also noted that everyone is different, and there is no “universal recipe” that works for everyone. (2014: 51.) Grodin’s interviewees mentioned this variability in what works for a certain person also, as did mine in terms of what kinds of self-care practices “work” for different people (Grodin 1991:410). Some self-help ideas needed

to be translated into the Russian cultural context in order to work (Salmenniemi and Vorona 2014:53). For instance, the positive thinking idea that thoughts construct reality was criticized by most interviewees. The idea that everything is within the individual's control and that one has all the responsibility to change things was seen as debilitating, since in reality social relationships affect the extent to what one person can do: "Popular psychology was seen as overlooking the socio-structural embeddedness of social actors and the ways it impacts on how one can move in social space." (2014: 54.)

In the case of Grodin's American self-help readers similar thoughts were voiced. Though self-help reading and new ideas of personal autonomy were linked with liberation from patriarchy, readers also saw the ways self-help dealt with relationships weren't realistic (Grodin 1991:413, 416).

> Their [readers] sense of self pivots upon a desire for autonomy and a desire for connection to a world beyond the self. There is a pull between autonomy and connection in the lives of those I interviewed that is not well articulated in most self-help books. (Grodin 1991:416.)

Social change was felt as "both exhilarating and painful". A new sense of autonomy that came with changing social norms was welcomed, but the women still felt the need for social connection, something they perceived self-help books didn't often address in meaningful ways. (Grodin 1991:416.) Books that focused on dating and building relationships were perceived as telling women that they needed to perfect themselves before entering a relationship. Simultaneously there was a focus on heterosexual relationships that seemed to imply that a woman wasn't complete without a man. The marketing of these books especially for women made one interviewee question where the books for men were. Telling only women to change made it sound like only women have something "wrong" with them, and that they are the only ones who need to do the "work" in relationships. One interviewee voiced deep dissatisfaction after reading a book where falling in love with a certain kind of man was put as the woman's fault for not "seeing the signs" that he wasn't committed to the relationship. No responsibility was laden to the man. (1991: 413-14.) In the Russian context a highly individual message was also perceived by a female reader as chauvinistic, when a male author was perceived to mean that only you are to blame for your problems (Salmenniemi and Vorona 2014:54). Then again, the feeling of inability to make structural change in current Russian society through collective means did make readers feel a sense of agency that at least one can make some change by beginning with oneself (2014: 55).

Salmenniemi and Vorona analyze the critical ways their Russian self-help readers engage with the material "as a symbolic struggle against the normalizing power of self-help technology". In their reading they contrasted the Russian ideas of selfhood and nationality with Western ones, seeing the self

> --as a relational and unique individual embedded in cultural, social and historical structures, and orientated towards 'inner harmony' rather than material success. This highlights how the new therapeutic knowledge of self-help intertwines and articulates with the particular local, historically sedimented understandings concerning personhood, ethics and nationality. (Salmenniemi & Vorona, 2014: 59.)

Honey has made similar findings in her study of a Moscow self-help group. People didn't simply accept self-help messages and apply them to their lives as such. In her ethnography with self-helpers she observed that they blended together many forms of knowledge in their projects of self-transformation. They combined political and social ideals from both Soviet and Post-Soviet times as well as philosophical and religious beliefs and practices from for instance New Age Spirituality, Russian mysticism and Hinduism. (Honey 2014:6.) She states that with these multiple interpretations and blending of resources, projects of self-helping cannot be simply labeled as creating neoliberal selves that fit the values of the market. The social and political changes in Russia have meant a tremendous transformation, but the ways people adapt to this come from multiple sources and cultural traditions. (2014: 6-8.)

Honey's self-helper's practices were individualistic in that they focused on the self. However, their views on the social world and society were different from those commonly associated with Western-originated self-help literature that focuses on personal responsibility. The self-help group Honey studied was inherently social and was used for networking and support. (Honey 2014:8.) Elements of both Soviet and current society were criticized and commended (2014: 26-7). Self-helpers were for instance critical of market economy and regretted the end of state-funded education. Those less fortunate weren't blamed for their troubles. (2014: 8.) Similarly, though self-helpers focused on the self and personal transformation, they also noted social concerns and wanted to help others (2014: 25). As one interviewee said:

> "A person needs to work on themselves, to cleanse and purify themselves, and fill themselves with love and light before they can help others and work for change. If people themselves are filled with problems, how can they help others? Sometimes of course, people don't take the next step. Sometimes a person just works on

> herself and doesn't worry about the rest of the world, but selfish people exist in all spheres." (Honey 2014:15.)

Self-helpers found empowerment and meaning in their combination of practices (Honey 2014:11). Similarly, Grodin asserts that "readers use self-help books in complex, and often empowering ways" (Grodin 1991: 404). In the Russian examples people combined different cultural knowledges in their self-helping practices. Grodin's readers read self-help in the same context the works originated from, but they too read selectively, piecing together ideas they found applicable to their own circumstances. The books were viewed as having limited capacity to cure, but taking ideas from various works felt empowering. (1991: 406.)

The cultural background of self-help writers as well, and the markets they are geared towards, affect how relations of the self and other are framed in self-help books (Salmenniemi and Pessi 2017:1, 10). In their enquiry into bestselling self-help manuals in Finland (2000-2009) Salmenniemi and Anne Pessi noticed that there was a difference in how selfhood was framed in globally targeted and Nordic self-help books (2017: 3, 10). In Nordic books, selfhood was seen as more entrenched in social and political frameworks. Political change was also seen as a possibility. Global bestsellers offered much less agency in terms of wider societal change and were more focused on individual self-change. (2017: 10.) Books targeted for the global market were often also more vague in their portrayals of society, which makes sense for their goal is to reach a wider audience (2017: 7-8). This comes to show that though self-help is a category originating from the United States and has a certain way of framing the self that arises from that society, the ways this genre has spread have also shaped these norms of selfhood to better fit local cultural contexts (2017: 10).

Lichterman and Simonds have made similar observations in their respective studies. Lichterman, setting out to investigate the influence self-help has on reader's lives, states that: "They [middle-class readers] read books ambivalently, and in ongoing relation to other frameworks for situating personal selfhood in a social context." (Lichterman 1992:422). Other cultural frames of reference were for example religion or a religious upbringing and feminism (1992: 437-38). Lichterman proposes the concept of "thin culture" to describe the process of meaning making in reading self-help, where there is a shared understanding between readers that self-help concepts can be adopted tentatively and freely and that the meanings and uses may vary (1992: 422, 426). Reading is done

with interplay with other cultural products (1992: 426). Lichterman uses the word "thin" here because of the low commitment necessary from readers. Books can be read and interpreted loosely and work as one part of constructing the self. (1992: 427.) One book isn't expected to give all the answers. Different concepts and ways of putting things are taken away from various books. New books are assumed to reflect new developments in psychology and thus give new insights. The mass-marketed nature of the books is also understood; things are sometimes put overly simplistically and repetitively. Still readers can find valuable "nuggets" from different books. (1992: 432-433.) Readers didn't view self-help as a definite source for self-making. As Lichterman puts it: "Self-help readers try out popular psychological guidance not as a definite, ideologically driven search for the perfect individuality but as an ambivalent, uncertain reach for a way to articulate personal challenges." (1992: 440.) One reader for instance criticized the highly individualist message in most self-help books with the idea of solving problems alone and the lack of encouraging connection with others. However, she kept reading because she found that the books brought out issues she might have thought being the only one having, and found a sense of community in that others are going through the same thing, as Grodin also noted in her study. (1992: 440-441.)

Reading self-help provides one way of constructing the self in "in a world without clear benchmarks for personal life". Though self-help isn't always perceived as offering whole truths, it's used because it's a means available to investigate ideas that might not otherwise come up in day-to-day relationships. Books give names to problems one didn't have a language to talk of before. However, this can also prove a source of anxiety – one reader said she had largely stopped reading self-help, because she got the feeling that there are so many things she should fix and that proved exhausting.(Lichterman 1992:441.) As discussed in the previous subchapter, the kind of self-work involved with improving the self can be tedious and exhausting. Luckily one can choose to have periods of reading and introspection and then decide to withdraw from this for periods of time. Thin culture can be engaged with in varying degrees. Thus self-help reading doesn't necessarily destroy traditional forms of authority such as religion, but can act as a way to question them and add new insight. (1992: 442.) What self-help reading brings people is a psychological framing of problems – a new language for interpreting personal life, as noted. Self-help reading contributes to a psychological framing of selfhood. (1992: 442-443.) The same can be said of

interacting with self-care culture, where especially mental health is discussed and the self is seen as a psychological being.

Simonds reminds us that not only in reading self-help are people subjected to its narratives and ideals. Women's magazines and talk shows are full of the same messages that are perhaps more elaborated in self-help books. Self-help authors use various mediums to get their points across and sell books. (Simonds 1992:217.) Now, almost 30 years after Simonds wrote her book on women and self-help culture, social media is an important arena for these messages. Self-help authors share their insight in their own Instagram accounts and their quotes are shared in various posts. In her book Simonds looks at the self-help sphere from various points of view, including that of readers, authors and editors. (1992: 213.) As previous self-help researchers have noted, Simonds states that self-help messages are individualistic and not turned towards social responses to problems. She also notes that readers don't read the books hoping for social change, but that they do perhaps deem it desirable. This is also where the sense of community readers feel is important. (1992: 227.) Simonds' study focuses especially on women who read self-help (which is the majority of self-help readers). Women's and men's roles were discussed both in how they are portrayed in self-help and how readers view these roles in their lives. Women are seen as caring too much about relationships and their maintenance. This is also a reason for reading self-help. Men, on the other hand, are seen as not caring enough. (1992: 214.) Women are also the main proponents of self-care culture. One of the upcoming chapters will be focused on the perceived roles of women, and why women engage more with self-care culture.

Sociologist Anthony Giddens sees that there is an emancipatory potential in therapeutic technologies. He calls self-help manuals "texts of our time", that can be used as a resource for self-reflection. (Giddens 1992:64.) In " the post-traditional order of modernity" the self is a reflexive project (Giddens 1991:5). With tradition having lost hold and local and global being in interplay in people's daily lives, individuals are given more and more options in how to life their life (1991: 5). However, contrarily to for example Cederström and Spicer, Giddens sees this choice more as a possibility and less as a burden or source of anxiety. Giddens sees that therapy, for example, can be understood to not only be a way of dealing with the new anxieties of modern life but "an expression of the reflexivity of the self" (1991: 34).

Giddens connects projects of self-making with institutions of modernity, which he depicts as being shaped by and shapes the emerging of these "new mechanism of self-identity" (Giddens 1991:2). He characterizes modernity as a post-traditional order, where doubt is always present. Defining features of what Giddens terms "late modernity" are uncertainty, a multiplicity of choices and risks – as do the neoliberal governance -focused explanations reviewed in the previous chapter. (1991: 2- 3.) The risks he talks of are embedded in the global nature of modernity, where distant events are brought close by news media and ecological disaster is ever more present in our lives all over the globe, as well as a constant possibility of conflict in military terms, but also through the global economic system or the rise of totalitarianism. (1991: 4.) He asserts that in many ways we live in single world unimaginable to earlier generations. Mass communication, internet and now especially social media unite people in unprecedented ways. However, simultaneously in modernity new modes of fragmentation and dispersal are formed. (1991: 5.)

Giddens argues that in this new post-traditional order of modernity, "self-identity becomes a reflexively organized endeavor" (Giddens 1991:5). The project of self-making consists of sustaining biographical narratives that are constantly revised yet coherent. I will later argue that self-care social media provides one important avenue for creating these narratives of oneself. Crucial to self-identity in a time of post-tradition, where an interplay of global and local permeates the everyday and choices are multiple, is lifestyle. The capitalist system of commodification works as a standardizing entity, but in general there are multiple authorities, a relatively "open" social life and many possible contexts of action, which means that lifestyle choice is important in constructing self-identity. (1991: 5.)

Lifestyle choices are not equally attainable for all, but Giddens sees that even in materially constrained situations some choices can be made, and the concept of lifestyle depicts this also. However, not all have the same possibilities for empowerment and self-actualization. (Giddens 1991:6.) With the local and global increasingly interrelated, questions of inequality raise moral concerns. Giddens argues that a sense of personal meaninglessness is a crucial psychic issue in late modernity. Direct connection with situations where moral questions occur are more fleeting in modern lives due to what Giddens terms the "sequestration of experience. (1991: 8-9.) Giddens sees that individuals are not necessarily separated from other people, but from "the moral

resources necessary to live a full and satisfying existence". (1991: 8- 9.) In self-making there can be actualization, but these reflexive projects on the self don't have moral meaning if they are perceived as a continuation of "the control systems of modernity" (1991:9).

Giddens sees that in this background "life politics" emerges as movements that are about individual as well as collective self-actualization (Giddens 1991:9). He defines life politics as:

> --life politics concerns political issues which flow from processes of self-actualization in post -traditional contexts, where globalizing influences intrude deeply into the reflexive projects on the self, and conversely where processes of self-realization influence global strategies." (Giddens 1991:214)

Giddens sees that life politics emerges partly from individuals having reached a certain autonomy to make choices; "life politics is a politics of lifestyle", "a politics of choice." (Giddens 1991:214).

This brings to mind what anthropologist Edward Fischer discovered in his comparative examination on wellbeing. Fischer conducted ethnographic fieldwork with urban German shoppers and rural Maya farmers in Guatemala, noticing that in these very different contexts having a larger purpose to life was a vital part of wellbeing (Fischer 2014:1, 7). Meaning was made through participating in projects that are not only propelled by self-interest but were found meaningful in wider terms (2014: 7). In Instagram self-care discussions a sense of meaningfulness comes from sharing messages and information that is perceived as important. These included reminding people to slow down and talk about their emotions and sharing mental health issues in order to end the stigma around them. Other facets to wellbeing Fischer found as fundamental for Germans and Mayas alike where aspirations, and possibilities for agency in actualizing these aspirations so opportunities, and a sense fairness and dignity. The cultural definitions of what is fair or what constitutes dignity or meaningfulness vary, but it is striking that there were such similar values important to a sense of wellbeing and living a good life in such different cultural contexts. (2014: 3, 5-7.)

Before moving on to the ways good life is perceived in transnational online self-care discourse, the next section will clarify the methods of research and analysis and the field

site for this thesis, as well as approach ethical dimensions of conducting ethnographic research online.

3. Research methodology and data

3.1 Instagram as field site: internet ethnography

Fieldwork for the thesis was conducted on the social media platform Instagram. Self-care is discussed in many corners of the internet and books have been written about it, but since I'm especially interested in how self-care is discussed, a social media platform seemed the space for learning about multiple views and opinions. Instagram is a relatively open platform which makes it suitable for research purposes. Only public Instagram accounts were used in the research. Various topics can be searched through hashtags. Twitter works similarly, but Instagram interests me because of its focus on sharing images. Also, being already acquainted with some self-care related accounts on Instagram provided a good starting point for beginning internet ethnography.

I began fieldwork with relatively open ideas of what interests me. I was interested in the role of self-care in the larger wellbeing-sphere and why it is currently so talked of. I wanted to know what constitutes self-care and how people view this practice – what kinds of ethical valuations lie beneath it. The relationship between the self and others and how society is framed were also of interest.

Kozinets terms internet ethnography "nethnography", which is "a specialized form of ethnography adapted to the unique computer-mediated contingencies of today's social worlds" (Kozinets 2010:1). Essentially, it's using ethnographic methods, such as participant observation and interviewing, but doing this online. For this thesis the primary research method was observation on Instagram. Initially my plan was to do participant observation, which would have included participating in discussions on Instagram. In the beginning of my fieldwork I however rejected this idea. Instagram conversations are held on comment sections of posts and are often just this: comments. Though spontaneous conversations are held in commenting on other's comments, participating in these kinds of discussions didn't seem to add much to the research data. The ways people comment and interact on Instagram is part of the study through comment chain discussions that were copied during fieldwork and are part of the analysis with the actual posts (picture and text content).

Instagram as a field site added some questions to the research about the significance of social media in conversations on wellbeing, especially in comparison to self-help books discussed earlier. Does social media work as a democratizing platform where anyone can post and share? Why is this important? What kind of content is found interesting? Why do people share their thoughts on self-care online? What kind of a community is formed around online self-care discussions? To get further knowledge and help answer these questions I also interviewed content providers who discuss wellbeing, especially self-care, on Instagram, and in some cases also a blog or website. Therefore, internet ethnography for this thesis contained observation on Instagram and interviewing content providers.

I began fieldwork in March 2019 and continued collecting Instagram material until July 2019. I created a researcher account on Instagram where I introduce myself and the research. I then started looking for self-care related posts and accounts that share them, copying interesting posts and comments. To search for relevant posts, I used hashtags such as #selfcare and #takecareofyourself. I started following accounts with interesting posts and these led me to new accounts. Sheer volume was a challenge. When I wrote my first research plan in April 2018 there were 5,3 million posts with the hashtag #selfcare. In October 2019 there were 20,6 million. I tried some different ways of collecting data through this multitude of posts. It helped that I was already quite acquainted with the field and could begin by following accounts I was familiar with, as well as relevant hashtags. Instagram's algorithm came to my aid also by suggesting accounts I might be interested in based on my previous follows. At one point I also checked the hashtag #selfcare daily and looked at the 9 "top posts" featured to get a more general view of what was shared and liked. Instagram observation was a learning process and I was constantly struggling with whether the material I found interesting was the most relevant. In hindsight at the beginning I think this led me to collect some posts that are actually a bit off-topic though related to wellbeing and the self. This did give a wider glance into self-care related phenomena, but for instance accounts that are more about the law of attraction or only positive thinking fell off in the analysis phase. Geographical borders were not used to limit the scope of the research. In a global social media such as Instagram this would be difficult in any case. The interesting thing about self-care discourse is also this transnational nature. Certain ways of understanding the self in self-care discourse seem to be accepted in different cultural contexts. The ways

information like this circulates and influences people's understanding is interesting. However, it's important to note that most of the researched content is probably from the Anglophone world. Only posts in English were collected. USA is the leader in user amounts on Instagram with 120 million users, with India and Brazil following (Statista 2020).

Interviewees were also found through Instagram and contacted through Instagram direct message or e-mail. I interviewed eight people via Skype. Two of these interviews were with a duo who Instagrammed/blogged together, and additionally I conducted one short written interview where my questions were answered via e-mail. The interviews lasted around one to two hours. All interviewees were female, between the ages of 23 to 43. Katrina, Donna and Dani are from the United States. Katrina (28), works as a therapist with teens, adolescents and young adults. She also has a brand through which she shares mental health and self-care resources and spreads awareness of these themes. Donna (34) is a magazine publisher, has a background in journalism and is now developing a self-care application, which has launched since the time of the interview. Dani (36) is an author, blogger, and designer who shares content focusing on positive personal development. Elena (39) lives in the UK and is a secondary school teacher and a health coach. Anne, Ellie and Mia are Canadian. Anne (43) works as a prep cook and has taken a coaching course with themes of confidence and self-love and care. Ellie (24) and Mia (23) are friends who Instagram together. Ellie is studying for a Master's in Entrepreneurship and Innovation and Mia had at the time of the interview recently graduated university with a degree from International Business and had started working at a commercial real estate company. Lena (27) and Hannah (24) are German, and friends who blog together. At the time of the interview Lena was working in Canada as a teacher, Hannah was studying to become a teacher in Germany.

My interest in these interviews was to talk with anyone who practices self-care and is interested in it, to ask what they do for self-care and why and how they got interested in wellbeing and talking about it in social media. The interviews were semi-structured and planning interview questions was guided by Instagram observations. Some basic questions were asked in all interviews, but questions were also modified by looking into interviewees social media presence and topics they were especially interested in. Conversations were let flow according to interviewees interests. Interviewing content providers was convenient for this thesis because they were already relatively active in

social media and had thought about self-care a lot previously, and through their content sharing were clearly interested in spreading the word on it. Some of the interviewees had a career that their social media presence was related to, as the short introductions reveal.

3.2 How analysis was conducted

Instagram images were collected as screenshots during fieldwork and comment section conversations were copy pasted and saved. The documents with the images and accompanying conversations were transferred to the qualitative data analysis program atlas.ti which was used for coding. Images were coded according to the central theme of the posts, such as "mental health" or "self-care practice" and "advice". At this point less relevant posts were excluded. The kinds of things that were excluded from analysis were posts focusing on the law of attraction, beauty routines, the power of positivity (if not connected with self-care or self-love), "women in business" type empowerment posts, fitness-posts, life quotes that weren't that much related to self-care, and New Age-type posts (horoscopes, "witches of Instagram" etc.). The reason there was some of this less relevant content in the posts I saved is that during fieldwork I wanted to get a broad picture of the self-care phenomenon and make sure I wasn't too biased by my own assessment of what is relevant. Especially when saving the 9 "top posts" with the hashtag #selfcare, there was some less relevant content included, since sometimes the hashtag #selfcare (and #selflove) is just slapped on posts that focus on something else. Since I collected over 600 posts in total during fieldwork, it was necessary to limit the number of posts taken for closer examination.

In the coding phase I also assessed the collection of hashtags on posts to determine the main theme of the post. Often there are around 20 or more hashtags in a single post. The hashtags are significant in that they help determine the target audience of the post. When there was a very random collection of hashtags (not very much thematically related) on posts and #selfcare was one of them, the post was usually not that relevant. Hashtags were used in this research more as a tool than the focus of attention. The main attention was given to the text or image of the posts, and the comments that followed.

Comment section conversations were also coded with atlas.ti. Not all posts had conversations accompanying them and some only had very short ones. At this point the conversations and comments coded for analysis was limited. Examples of different

kinds of communications observed were included. Interest was mostly given to conversations that touched upon personal experience or had multiple kinds of responses. Interviews were transcribed and also transferred to atlas.ti for coding.

Codes were organized into code groups, which helped determine the general themes that arose from the research materials. This was used in the grouping of analysis chapters that are to follow. The approach was on the inductive side, though acquaintance with earlier research on similar subjects directed attention towards certain aspects of self-care discourse.

3.3 Ethical considerations

In addition to standard research protocols such as informed consent, internet ethnography presents some additional problematics on research ethics. Relevant for this thesis is that direct quotations from web discussions are easily traceable and may lead to identifying persons. Comments from Instagram posts aren't cited word for word because of this easy traceability of profiles. Quotes are treated as literary works, and cited accordingly, excluding widely shared quotes, such as "Fill your own cup first" where the original writer is unknown. Some quotes and caption texts have been edited to make them non-traceable. Only public Instagram accounts have been used in the research. Consent has been asked for the images included in the thesis and are credited to their creators, as they wished. The researcher identified her status as researcher by using the user id "@self-care_researcher" on Instagram. On the "@self-care_researcher" Instagram page there was an explanation of the study and an e-mail address that possible questions could be sent to.

For interviews informed consent was asked for before each interview in the form of a written form signed electrically (reveals researcher, research study, the use of information, asking about level of protection desired). Research details were also provided. Pseudonyms are used for all interviewees except two who have wished to have their names published (Katrina and Dani).

Data has been stored in University of Helsinki Z-drive and will be only used for this thesis.

4. Defining self-care

4.1 The self-care mindset

> "It's literally in the name, it's taking care of yourself." (Ellie)

After reviewing key analytical concepts and the development of wellness and therapeutic culture, as well as how this research was conducted, I will turn the focus to the research findings on self-care discourse. This first chapter will focus on defining the concept of self-care. As Ellie's quote demonstrates, self-care can be defined simply as taking care of oneself. However, during fieldwork I observed specific ways of talking about self-care that elucidate how this concept is currently understood in Instagram self-care discourse. The ways of description I observed were through the self-care mindset of how to relate to oneself in a specific way, suggestions for self-care practices, and through perceived misconceptions of a general understanding of self-care and what "true" self-care is. I will analyze these descriptions mirroring them with ideas of the self put forward by self-help manuals as well as Foucault's descriptions of Antique self-care practices as technologies of the self. I will finish this section with the benefits my interviewees had noticed from their self-care practices and how they perceived these practices had changed them.

Mindset

Self-care isn't only about the action of caring for the self. In Instagram, many posts on self-care are about ways of relating to the self and advice on cultivating a specific kind of relationship with the self. Instagrammers post advice where choosing oneself first, accepting oneself, talking to oneself with love and respect and being kind to oneself are key ways to cultivate a "self-carey" relationship with the self. There is this specific attitude where the self is highly valued. Simultaneously it seems to be implied that these things are not widely accepted ways in society to relate to oneself. I will discuss how the self and its relationship to others and society in general is framed in more detail in the next chapter. Here it suffices to say that the self-care way of relating to oneself and taking care of oneself first is something that is assumed to not be taken for granted and that people need to be reminded of.

I term this specific way of relating to the self *the self-care mindset*. Donna described this attitude of valuing herself over other engagements when telling me about her morning on the day of the interview. Her daughter had woken up in the night with a

nightmare and Donna had to console her and get her back to sleep. That day she was supposed to get up early to go to a networking event for work, but when she woke up, she was very tired from the night before – she described it as her brain being "grumpy". Donna described how she thought about rushing to get up and go to the event feeling wiped out or skip it and stay home. She opted for staying home. She went through her morning self-care routine, which includes having a big class of water, thinking of things she is grateful for, such as her kids being safe and her husband (who travels a lot for work) being home, and putting on her lotion while saying positive affirmations about her body. She made the choice to stay home so she could rest and told me that that to her is self-care: choosing her mental health over a work obligation.

This illustrates well the idea of taking care of oneself *first*. Cederstöm and Spicer argue that wellness is practiced in order to be able to keep up with current work life. Working out and taking care of one's health is about becoming more productive. (Cederstöm and Spicer 2015:40, 132.) Donna's example is about choosing her own wellbeing and self-care before her work when she is able to. Katrina also told me that part of her self-care is taking "mental health days" off work when she needs some extra time to take care of her mental health. She said she values her work as a therapist highly but saw through her experience of starting to near burnout that she needs to care for herself too. Thus caring for the self is partly about being able to keep up with pressures from work life, though ultimately both Donna and Katrina speak of choosing their health over their work by skipping work to take care of themselves. Work is a large part of life in Western capitalist societies and self-care is seen to benefit all aspects of life, including work life. Self-care practices can simultaneously provide agency yet be about coping with all aspects of life in current society.

The self-care mindset is something that is framed as a requisite for the action of caring for the self. One needs to listen to oneself in order to know what one needs from their self-care. Elena said that the main thing for her in terms of self-care has been tuning into herself and listening to what she needs. Ellie called this "checking in on herself". Similarly, one Instagrammer prompted her followers to add self-care check-ins into their day-to-day lives; taking a little pause to see if one needs anything, such as a drink of water or some mindful breaths. Lena said that to her self-care begins with listening to her gut feeling or intuition, which helps her determine how she feels and what she needs. Lena described herself as a very work-oriented person but told me how the self-

care way of doing things has made her question why she makes the choices she makes in terms of her career.

> "Am I trying to prove myself a point or trying to reach a goal that I really focus on, which can be achieved in a more self-carey way than just pushing through and reaching it, just for the sake of it?" (Lena)

Hannah defines self-care as what she does when she doesn't feel okay. She says that self-care is the behavior that changes her "innermost feeling" to okay or better. One Instagrammer framed it as listening to her intuition and trusting her "inner guide". These different phrases describe how one listens to oneself, be it intuition, a gut feeling or innermost feelings. It seems to imply that there is something within each of us, that if we listen to, can tell us what we need in order to care for ourselves.

This idea that there is an inner self or authentic self is something that many self-help books proclaim. Salmenniemi and Pessi state that awareness and self-reflection were seen as central ethical virtues in the self-help books they analyzed. These were also used as techniques of cultivating one's relationship to the self. The "authentic self" was described as something everyone has, but that must be recovered with the aid of therapeutic techniques. There is a view of society or socialization as harmful to the self, that one has an obligation to reconnect with this authentic, pure self. (Salmenniemi and Pessi 2017:5.) In self-care discourse there is often this conception that there needs to be an awareness of the self and that the relationship with the self is something that it is important to cultivate. But it isn't necessary the case of "finding one's authentic self" as in self-help manuals. As described above, my interviewees talked more of moments of checking in with the self. The inner self or feeling isn't something that is far away inside of us, that must be recovered with arduous work, but something that we must simply pause to listen to.

> "Probably the best way to say the inner voice would be a feeling. It's a feeling of 'do I do this' and 'how does this make me feel'. Being uncomfortable doing something is okay, but being uncomfortable to the point where you know that you're not doing the right thing and you are making the wrong choice, that's your inner voice or your inner feeling or whatever you want to call that. It's a feeling of knowing if what you're doing is the right thing." (Anne)

There is, however, a similar idea as in self-help books that the self is a prime source of knowledge for a person and that answers are to be found within, not in social interaction (Salmenniemi and Pessi 2017:4–5).

Foucault's conversation on the relationship between the two moral principles in Antiquity, "Know yourself" and "Take care of yourself" and how their relationship has shifted provides some background into how self-knowledge and caring for the self interconnect today. In antiquity it was caring for the self that brought knowledge of the self. Caring for the self was "one of the main rules for social and personal conduct and for the art of life". (Foucault 1988a:19–20.). The injunction to "Know yourself" became more prominent later, which Foucault denotes to Christian traditions. Knowledge of the self was important in Christianity since one had to know one's thoughts to look for sin. However, this knowledge was then used for self-renunciation. (Foucault 1988a:22, 40.). Caring for the self was renouncing the self, and knowing the self was the basis for self-renunciation (Foucault 1988b:8). Foucault speaks of Christianity of the 4th and 5th centuries, but self-knowledge for sin-searching was also important for Calvinists many centuries later. (Foucault 1988a: 19, Ehrenreich 2009: 90). Ehrenreich denotes Calvinism as a reason for the birth of the New Thought movement, which was part of the development of positive thinking, an important doctrine in self-help books currently as well. (Ehrenreich 2009:79, 90).

The current self-care discourse is set into this background. Knowledge of the self and care of the self are in an ambiguous relationship. Knowledge of the self is a requisite for caring for the self but caring for the self can also be source for self-knowledge. Self-knowledge is however not done in search for faults and with the goal of self-renouncement. The background of Christianity is however visible in the ways caring for the self before caring for others and loving the self are often justified in Instagram as "not being selfish" – which implies that they are often assumed to be selfish. In early Christianity there was "renunciation of all that could be love of self, attachment to a worldly self" that was care of the self. Love of self was found to be morally suspect. (Foucault 1988b:8.) Now love of self, which will be discussed in more detail in later chapters, is framed more as an ethical act, as is caring for the self. When one loves and cares for oneself, one is able to do the same to others.

Misconceptions

Often when self-care is described on Instagram, these descriptions begin phrases such as: "self-care is often misunderstood, …", "self-care isn't always…" or "true self-care is not…". Self-care is defined through the negative, through the perceived misconceptions

of what it means. These perceived misconceptions of what self-care is are often related to beauty routines. Elena told me that when she first heard of self-care, she thought that it was more about pampering. One Instagrammer wrote that self-care is sometimes thought to only mean getting a manicure or buying a new purse. In one Instagram post a quote featuring this text was shared:

> "True self-care is not salt baths and chocolate cake, it is making the choice to build a life you don't need to regularly escape from." (Wiest 2017)

There seems to be this understanding that many people think self-care is only related to pampering or beauty routines. This is one way of defining self-care and my interviewees noted that that is also part of self-care. Ellie told me that she loves baths and that taking baths is important for her in terms of self-care, but she said this almost apologetically, noting how stereotypical that sounds. Hannah likes to do face scrubs and sees eating a tub of chocolate ice cream as self-care when she feels like it. But there is something more in self-care than the action of taking a bath or eating chocolate, which seems to be connected to the self-care mindset previously discussed. This was described as "true self-care" or that self-care is on "a deeper level".

> "I do what I want because I feel like it and I think I deserve it. I thought about it, made up my mind about what I want and that's a big part of self-care to me." (Hannah)

There appear to be two different understandings of self-care. Some see self-care as only about pampering and beauty rituals, others as somethings that has this deeper meaning. Those who see self-care as having a deeper meaning see it as something essential to a person, their health and happiness. My interviewees and most of the posts I collected are in this second group of self-carers. For them there is a will to educate other people on what is "true" self-care.

> "I go out and publicly speak about self-care misconceptions. I talk about the very common ones: that it's just for women, it's selfish, takes up too much time and it's too expensive. I usually tackle those four and then the fifth one I tackle is to get people aware of what we don't like to talk about especially here, that sexual health is part of self-care, but here in the United States that's very taboo, so that one depends on my audience." (Donna)

There is a lot of self-care related content on Instagram that is related only to beauty routines (which is out of the scope for this research). Many beauty companies label and market their products as part self-care rituals and Instagram is a prime place to do this. This might be a reason self-care was often defined through opposition to this focus on outer beauty. Though I'm not here focused on the marketing potential of framing a

product as a "self-care ritual" it is important to remember this aspect of it too. It is relevant in the way "true" self-care is framed in opposition to this. Related is also the misconception of self-care being something expensive, or a luxury that only few people can afford.

> "I think it's [self-care] not just a luxury, many people think of wellness as a luxury, but it is a basic need. And to show them that it's not about having money but is about asking yourself and accepting the person that you are. It's not about going to the luxury hotel and swimming in an infinity pool, it is about just sitting down and not looking at your phone for three hours at night or until you go to bed." (Lena)

Instagrammers counter these ideas of self-care requiring lots of time or money. Everyone has the possibility for small acts of self-care. Katrina said that many people don't realize that small dosages of self-care count. Daily habits matter, whether one is at home or at work. Katrina said that through cultivating small self-care habits she avoided burnout. One Instagrammer talks of how self-care is just every day, mundane things. It can just be remembering to drink water and eat. Donna stresses consistency in finding small things to do daily to nurture ourselves. Everyone has time for small things, whether that's stretching for three minutes or meditating for five. She notes that in times of stress this is especially important, but that is when people often neglect themselves.

Image courtesy of Dominee @blessingmanifesting

In countering ideas of self-care as only pampering or beauty related, true self-care is also described as tough, hard or difficult. This idea of self-care as something that is necessary, but not always easy, came up many times in the course of the research. One post (image above) lists these kinds of things with the heading: "Tough self-care: sometimes self-care is hard and uncomfortable but feels so good in the end." Suggestions for tough self-care include unfollowing social media accounts that don't affect you positively, creating boundaries with people, working on bad habits, curbing overspending and going to therapy if possible. One Instagrammer said that self-care is especially important when it feels hard. Sometimes doing for instance yoga can help feel better when she feels depression and anxiety coming, but the depressed feelings can make one unmotivated. Doing it, engaging in the self-care practice anyway, feels good in the end. Lena summarizes this thought of self-care being sometimes difficult in the moment, but in the end affects long-term well-being thus:

> "I recently came across a very interesting fact or a quote that said that self-care doesn't need to feel good. I found that super interesting and I gave that some thought and that connects to me a lot, because you just do things that you know in the long run are good for you, but sometimes you're too tired to do it or you don't feel like you want to concentrate on it. But if you do it and if you take the time and stick to it, you definitely feel the result after. Especially in a fast-paced environment where you push yourself to always perform better and more, I feel like that connects." (Lena)

Or in a more conspicuous wording:

> "If you have time to feel like shit, complain and check social media, then you have time to meditate, write in your journal, create a list of goals, make a list of things you are grateful for and better yourself."

Practice

After defining the frame of mind that is necessary for self-care, as well as what self-care is defined as not being, I'll look at what kinds of ways to practice self-care came up during the research. Ideas for self-care practices circulate Instagram widely. However, there appears to be no one way of caring for the self. Individualism is at the core: everyone is different, and so different practices "work" for different people. This is similar to what was noted in terms of self-help books – people are individuals and certain books, or self-help ideas work for certain people (e.g. Grodin). The practices that constitute self-care are seen to differ according to each person, there is no one recipe for all. Each individual is different; therefore, it follows that practicing self-care can look different for everyone.

> "I define it [self-care] as just doing what you need to do to make yourself feel the best you can be. I think it changes per each person and the definition of self-care and what that entails can be very different per person." (Mia)

However, certain practices came up many times in the course of the research. These were: sleep, taking breaks, walking, journaling, eating well, social support, alone time, yoga, rest, reading, going out in nature, face-scrub, drinking water, practicing gratitude, mediating, taking a bath, listening to podcasts. Others were for example praying, saying affirmations, creative activities (drawing and writing), owning a dog, kickboxing, going to the country, painting, jumping on mini-trampoline, essential oils, dancing and listening to music. A post saying "Self-care is what you say it is" sums it up. Self-care can be anything, as the below post declares.

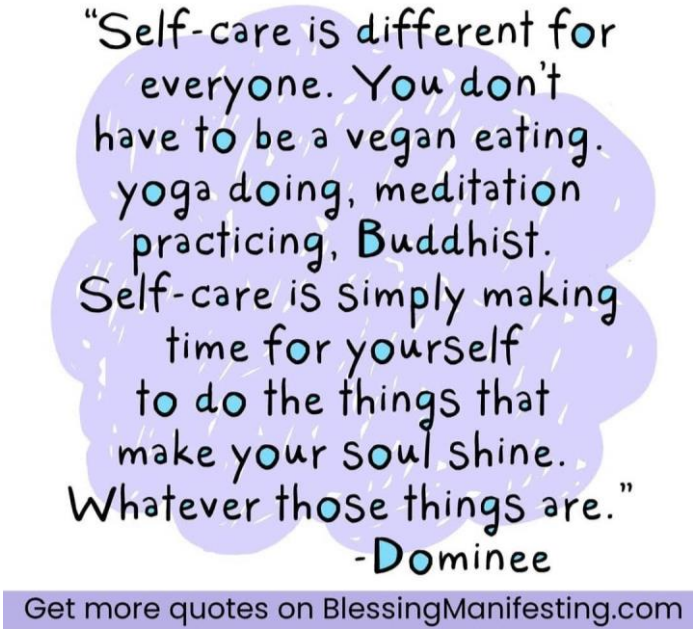

Image courtesy of Dominee @blessingmanifesting

In Foucault's dives into caring for the self in Antiquity, he noted that caring for the self was both a theoretical principle and a practice (Foucault 1988a:21). Foucault describes practices of caring for the self for the Greeks. Writing was an important aspect in taking care of the self. Especially in the first and second centuries, Foucault notes, writing about the self became "more and more detailed" which led to a new experience of the self, through this vigilant new detailed introspection. (1988a: 27-28.) All aspects of life were written about, such as mood, thoughts, and what one has done during the day: "these details are important because they are you-what you thought, what you felt" . (1988a: 28-29.) The practices associated with taking care of the self and acquiring self-

knowledge had different variations in different times. For the Stoics the art of listening to one's master was how truth could be acquired. One was obliged to listen to the truth from the master as well as listen to the self for an inner truth, "the truth within" (1988a: 32-33.) However, this wasn't about finding an inner truth in the subject but remembering the truth that was forgot, truth in rules of conduct. Another Stoic technique of the self, in addition to self-disclosing letter-writing and self-examination was *askesis.* For Stoics, askesis was "a process of becoming more subjective". (1988a: 34-35.) It meant constant review or mastery over the self through learning and incorporating truth from the teachings of the teachers. Teachings were memorized and turned into rules of conduct - truth was subjectivized. Askesis consisted of meditation and training. It was about testing oneself to see if one is prepared for different situations, testing whether truth is assimilated enough for one to be able to do the correct thing. (1988a: 35-36.)

Currently practices of caring for the self are much less defined and more individual. There are some similarities, however. Techniques of askesis, mediation and training, can on some level be compared to current mental and physical self-care. Writing, though for the Greeks it was letter-writing, now it is often journaling, was also mentioned by many as a self-care practice. Katrina likes to journal after work, to calm her after a stressful day at work. Self-examination is part of writing. However, there is no one truth to learn from a master, as for the Stoics. Advice on living is learned from various sources, one of these being social media.

Transformations

Interestingly, the benefits of self-care aren't discussed much in Instagram. It seems more like there is a general understanding that self-care is good for one's wellbeing, but during my research I didn't see many posts that describe what kinds of things changed for people, if any, when they started to practice self-care. Therefore, I asked my interviewees if they had noticed any changes in their lives or themselves since they started practicing self-care. The benefits my interviewees noticed are to do with increased self-knowledge.

Many brought up better *awareness* that has helped them understand themselves better and which has led to self-confidence in the choices they make. Decision-making is more of a process of looking inward and reflecting on what one really wants or needs. This

awareness also has helped make the choice to start making changes, such as eating healthy. Donna says that she became more aware of the things that trigger her anxiety and depression and could then attempt to curb these things. Katrina says that self-care activities help her calm down after a stressful day at work. Also she has learned to focus more on herself.

> "I am not as afraid to say 'no' to people like I was before. I was so hesitant because I feel guilty, I love doing things to make other people happy, but then I would do that and in return I would feel like I got all empty. So it has definitely taught me how to say 'no' and be more confident in my choices, in my decisions. Because before I was on the defense and uncertain. It has allowed me to focus more on my mental health and make it important." (Katrina)

Lena notes how she feels more clarity. In possibly uncomfortable situations, she can take a step back and check in on herself, how she feels, and react more "truthfully", not just spontaneously or irrationally. She also says that she feels like she's giving herself more respect and just feels better in general. Similarly, Ellie says that she feels better about herself in general, both physically and mentally. She says that it has helped in her relationships. She says she is better aware of herself and more able to cope with difficult situations. She uses self-reflection and journaling to help her figure out behaviors of others, which helps her deal with social situations. She also notes having less anxiety than before. Elena also says that self-care practices have helped with her mental health. She is better able to register her feelings when she has anxiety and remember that it will only be for a moment and that she will get through it. She is also eating healthier and mentions she's lost weight.

> "Me today compared to me last year or the year before is a completely different person. I know I'm still a work in progress and I'm happy that I still want to develop myself. But I can honestly say that I'm happy with who I am today and couple of years ago I couldn't have said that to you." (Elena)

Anne and Donna also brought up that if you do things just because this is what other people do or because family members want you to live your life in a certain way, you won't be living for yourself. A self-care attitude is about respecting the self, loving the self and making choices that benefit the self. As noted, interviewees spoke especially of better mental health that has come from processing their emotions and increased understanding of the self and others as well. Anne notes a change in her mindset, especially in regard to difficult times in her life.

> "I would say adopting some self-care has changed a lot of things. It's opened up and changed how I was thinking of things, it's definitely changed my mindset. I know for me

> it's made me a lot softer, because I could have stayed like a rock and chose not to." (Anne)

Based on these accounts there appears to be a sense of agency in self-care practices for my interviewees. A feeling of agency in being able to change something in oneself, if not more widely in society, was also found in studies on self-help readers (e.g. Salmenniemi and Vorona). For my interviewees practicing self-care meant an increase in self-knowledge, which was framed as a better awareness of oneself, which then abled them to engage in self-care practices. Woodstock relates that "know yourself" has been a key phrase in self-help since its beginning. There is this idea that both problems and answers to them are to be found within. (Woodstock 2007:181–82.) The idea of problems arising from the self is related to the idea of positive thinking and of everything in life presented as a choice that Ehrenreich and Cederström and Spicer criticize. Choice becomes responsibility. In self-care discourse there is the idea of answers being found in the self. The self-care mindset is about listening to the self in order to care for the self. Then again, problems weren't necessarily framed as coming from the self. None of my interviewees spoke of positive thinking in the sense that they believe things go wrong because people aren't thinking positively enough. Issues that had my interviewees turn to self-care were to do with work pressures, illness in the family and mental health issues. These problems were recognized as coming from the outside and not being anyone's fault – though society was criticized as putting too much stress and pressure on people. However, since these things had happened in the lives of my interviewees, self-care practices were a way to cope.

For the Greeks self-knowledge was acquired through caring for the self (Foucault 1988a:20). Practices of the self were engaged in for the purpose of living a beautiful life through these "arts of existence", which is what the moral code of conduct was based on – the individual wanting to live a beautiful life. (Foucault 1985: 11-12; Markula 2004: 305.) In addition, caring for the self was assumed to make one a just politician (Foucault 1988a:25-26.) Self-knowledge also came from practicing self-care for my interviewees. It was often framed as an ethical act that is done for the benefit of others as well as the self, which will be further discussed in later chapters. If practices of the self were for the Greeks a way to live a beautiful life, what is wished to be achieved with caring for the self in the current time? Often the benefits of self-care are articulated as increased health and wellbeing, especially when it comes to mental health, as my interviewees said. Caring for the self led to better awareness of the self, self-knowledge, which my

interviewees found to make them healthier and happier. Following Foucault, practices of caring for the self can currently be understood as "technologies of the self, which permit individuals to effect -- a certain number of operations on their own bodies and souls, thoughts, conduct, and way of being, so as to transform themselves in order to attain a certain state of happiness", health and wellbeing (Foucault 1988a:18).

4.2 Categories of care

Self-care, as portrayed in Instagram, is about the relationship with the self. It's about listening to what the self needs, an awareness, and then the action of doing what is needed to care for that need. In describing possible self-care activities, many Instagrammers would divide aspects of self-care into categories.

> "I think you can take care of yourself in terms of self-care both mentally and physically and I think they vary greatly." (Mia)

Caring for the mind can entail journaling, meditation, or talking to a friend. Physical self-care can be exercise, whether that's a walk, yoga or kickboxing and being mindful of nutrition. This division of body and mind has a long history in Western imaginations of the person. It is often connected with René Descartes, who in the 17th century conceived of a clear hierarchy between mind and body. The body was more like a machine or something that belongs to nature, while the mind is where rationality reigns. (Sointu 2012:152.) Eeva Sointu sketches out how the mind and body were already separated in Greek philosophy and later on Christianity. According to Sointu, McGuire (2008) has written that in Christian reform movements the body was separated from the spirit as part of the profane and outside from religiosity. (2012: 151.) Later on, biomedical understandings and their focus on the physical aspects of health have brought this dualism even more cemented in Western everyday understandings of the person (2012: 152). Physical and mental health or illness are taken for granted ways of categorizing wellbeing. The major categories of care in self-care discourse are usually noted as being physical self-care and mental or emotional self-care.

Mind, body, and spirit

In addition to mind and body, the spirit is also an often-mentioned category in self-care discourse. Sointu notes that in wellbeing discourse in general, there is an emphasis on

mind and body, but also spirit. The meaning of "spirituality", however, varies (Sointu 2012:166).

> "Fall in love with taking care of yourself. Mind. Body. Spirit."

Spirituality and religion are not synonymous here. Sointu describes spirituality in the holistic health domain as being marked by eclecticism and that spirituality is seen as an individual choice, not continuation of tradition. A person is seen to possess the capacity to decide what to believe in and how to manifest it. Sointu says that values that are incorporated in spirituality include reflexivity, self-responsibility and inner depth. (Sointu 2012:166.) As spirituality is not necessarily organized, it also usually is not located in an institutionalized setting, but is conceived of as a part of the mundane, in everyday life where it's part of meaning-making. Spirituality gives a sense of there being a higher power that can direct life. (2012:167.) Elena, talking of what good health means to her, said that it includes physical and mental health, as well as emotional and spiritual aspects. She elaborated that when talking of spirituality many people automatically think of religion, but spirituality to her means connecting to her inner self, being happy with oneself and improving the self, taking care of oneself and others, not harming others and being open and giving. There are values here that Sointu mentioned as part of modern spirituality: reflexivity, inner depth, and responsibility of the self. In addition, Elena also talks of taking care of others and not harming others. She said that she was christened, but says she is non-practicing, and defines herself as more spiritual than religious. She opined that the underlying message in most faiths is the same. Anne said she is not religious at all, but said she believes in something "out there".

> "I think obviously there's something out there somewhere, do I call it God, no, but there is a reason that things happen, and I don't know what it is. I guess some people would say just trust in the universe, which I guess we all do that whether we call it God or what." (Anne)

This idea of trusting in the universe is something that came up many times during the research. It is especially used regarding posts on the law of attraction, where the universe is used, as Anne does above, as a sort of equivalent for God or some sort of higher power. One Instagram commenter said on a post concerning relationship advice that "wow, the Universe is constantly giving me answers". It is this idea Sointu mentioned of a higher power that is directing life, giving meaning to things in life - even seeing a certain post on Instagram that brought up new ideas for a person. In the "law of attraction" it is the universe that gives one everything one thinks up. It is also worded as

"aligning with the universe" and "manifesting" these good things to come. One Instagram commenter, commenting on a post about Buddhist ideas, talks of his Christian background, then getting acquainted with Buddhism and other belief systems and religions and how he came to form his own understanding of spirituality. How he describes this spirituality is exactly as in the New Thought movement Ehrenreich described. The commenter said, "We are all one, all god, all things are in fact god." (Ehrenreich 2009:79, 85.) He also talks of love and light, loving oneself as key to loving others, and positivity – ideas related to self-help and positive thinking.

There is a general attitude in self-care discourse of "everything goes". The spiritual aspect of self-care can be this kind of non-specific trust in something out there that is directing life. Of my interviewees Katrina and Donna are practicing Christians. Praying and reading scripture is part of their self-care practices. In general, this spiritual or religious aspect was noted as "spiritual self-care" in self-care discourse, leaving it open for many interpretations. Spirituality is everyone's own choice that they can manifest in their lives however they wish and incorporate in their self-care routines how they best see fit.

Negotiating categories

When self-care practices are categorized further, the ways of categorization vary between people. Usually there is the idea that there are these major categories – mind, body and sometimes spirit – which then can be further divided into smaller pieces. Categories that came up during the research have included physical, mental, emotional, psychological, social, financial, professional, sexual, and personal self-care. These categories are not set in stone and have overlap. For example, practices such as meditation or yoga can be seen to benefit both mind and body. Anne first categorized meditation into her emotional self-care. However, when considering her physical self-care practices, she thought of mediation also, saying that when meditating her "brain is still moving" and ended up classifying mediation as both physical and mental self-care. Sointu, talking of holistic health practices, notes that there is an attention to the *whole* person, meaning body, mind and spirit. People are thought to consist of intertwined body and mind, and as noted, sometimes also spirit (Sointu 2012:149.)

> "When I think of wellbeing I think of the whole person, the whole self, multidimensional. We're talking about mental health but it's not just about the mind and the brain it's also the physical component, our spiritual being. A lot of these things make up who we are as

> an individual. So when we don't focus on the whole wellbeing of ourselves, then we're risking issues happening in different areas that we might neglect unintentionally. Like I say multidimensional, it's lots of different layers to ourselves." (Katrina)
>
> "I think that the wellbeing is everything from the physical wellbeing to your spiritual wellbeing, because it all connects together. Wellbeing is anything that encompasses every part of your wellbeing, from your physical to your emotional to your social to your…it's all one thing I guess, it's one thing." (Anne)

Other people and one's environment are also perceived to be connected. When it comes to holistic health practices, illnesses are more that physical symptoms as in biomedicine. The body isn't only a "silent", negatively coded entity, where the mind is what makes a person human. The connection of body and mind gives importance to physical experiences. (Sointu 2012:149–50.) Sointu notes, however, that wellbeing discourse doesn't necessarily challenge the notion of mind being valued over the body, but also reproduces historically grounded cultural understandings. The connection of body and emotions is through the body as a container for past experiences and emotions. The body is like raw material, as Sointu puts it, that past trauma or unresolved emotions are carried in. It's important to become aware of the things that are embodied in order to heal from them. So the mind is the reflexive entity that listens to the knowledge of the body. In the holistic health practices Sointu studied, she says that the idea of holism gives power, ownership, and an active role to the client in health as well as illness. She notes that this conceptualization of holism is also aligned with trends in society at large, such as self-responsibility, -fulfillment and reflexivity. (Sointu 2012:150.) Elena, who talked to me of holistic health, said that:

> "I think realizing that health is holistic and you are in control of it, no matter what the situation, you need to take ownership of your health and once you do that then you're on a path to happiness." (Elena)

Elena connects ideas of holistic health and ownership of one's health and happiness. Where writers such as Rimke or McGee might see this focus on health as a personal responsibility as a responsibilitation of the individual, Elena sees the idea of ownership as empowering and giving her agency of her own wellbeing. As noted earlier, she said that discovering self-care and holistic health had helped her make big changes in her life concerning both physical wellbeing and mental health, her anxiety, which she had learned to relate to in a more reflexive manner.

Also biomedical ideas of connections between mind and body and scientific terminology were used by my interviewees, when speaking of how mental and physical self-care support each other. Donna told me that sometimes her self-care can simply be

hugging her kids, telling them "let's boost mommy's oxytocin levels" explaining to me that oxytocin is the hug hormone. Elena mentions a chemical release that happens when exercising, which makes one feel good mentally as well as physically while moving the body. Ellie similarly notes that exercise helps with her mental health saying that "exercise helps my brain". Mentions of the brain in reference to the mind and mental health show the influence of scientific norms in Western understandings of the self. Mental health is seen as grounded physically in the brain. In one Instagram post depression was linked to the person's brain not working right. Another said that mental health should be thought of as "brain health". Ellie says that she looks after her brain by going to a counsellor. Lena and Hannah spoke about the psychosomatic concept, how for example people might get stomach problems when stressed though there is no physiological explanation. Lena also elaborated that the gut feeling she described is also a literal gut feeling, noting that the gut is called the second brain. In this sense the categories that self-care can be sorted into are fluid. Mia describes the ambiguity of these categorizations, concluding that what makes something self-care is the mindset, as was noted in the previous section:

> "I feel like social self-care is almost like a subcategory of mental. There's many subcategories of mental, and that's almost the biggest one because they're kind of intertwined. I feel like physical self-care can help your mental self-care. And your mental self-care can help your physical self-care. You have to be in the right mindset for both of those for them to actually benefit you and be self-care. (Mia)

Categories are created around these perceived aspects of the self, as in physical and mental, but also around different facets of life, such as professional, personal or financial self-care. One Instagrammer, writer and illustrator categorized her self-care into "different selves" she is caring for: her work self, relationship self, physical self, home self, 85 year old self and 5-year old self, saying that "Caring for yourself often looks like caring for lots of selves" (Mari Andrew). Katrina described to me her self-care at work, which includes taking breaks during the day and listening to music to center herself or walk around her office for some fresh air and sometimes taking "mental health days" off work. Wellbeing and self-care are in everything one does.

> "I think it's important because it impacts every aspect of your life, so if you're not doing well, if you're not taking care of your emotional, physical and mental wellbeing it really goes into different facets of your life. It could negatively impact your work, your family... Everything is really linked to those things, so taking care of yourself and being aware of your wellness and your wellbeing is important, because it impacts everything in your life." (Elena)

The reason for creating categories for self-care, both for every person individually and in Instagram self-care discourse with ideas for different aspects of self-care, appears to be in making it easier to understand the general wellbeing of the person and see if there is an area that is neglected. Commenters on an Instagram post with ideas for different aspects of self-care (emotional, mind, body) said that "splitting self-care into parts helps compartmentalize things in attempting to sort out one's brain", and that "sometimes it's easy to focus on one are of self-care and neglect others, then getting confused why one isn't starting to feel better". These categories are a helpful tool in listening to what one needs.

> "I definitely think there are different categories. Where you can say 'oh I really need to work on a certain thing', though of course it connects together. I think it's good that we have certain categories as we can explore them more. If we just say there's one big batch of wellness, it's like the same thing, if you say there is the psyche which is one thing, no there are so many different categories that are important and that need to be paid close attention to and of course we differentiate it to actually analyze like what are we doing here." (Lena)

In summary, the categories that self-care is divided into reflect ideas of personhood and the self that are historically and culturally grounded in Western society, such as the separation of mind and body, but are also influenced by spiritual ideas and for example holistic health practices, that see the mind and body as connected. Categories of care are ambiguous, and though interviewees said that there are categories to self-care, these categories were also negotiated in the course of our conversations - running can help with anxiety and mediation is beneficial for both body and mind. Self-care is also something that is part of professional, personal and other aspects of life which require their own set or practices for caring for the self.

4.3 Mental health

Of the larger categories of care self-care is divided into, taking care of mental health is especially talked of online. As discussed previously, there is a division of mind and body in Western thought. This is visible in the ways wellness and caring for the self is conceived, but also in the way biomedicine is divided into physical and mental health. This subchapter will concentrate on mental health regarding self-care discussions. The reason for highlighting mental health in this way is that it was brought up in Instagram discussions and by my interviewees as something they think isn't talked of enough in society. It is perceived that there is stigma regarding mental health issues or illnesses that differs from the way physical illnesses are discussed.

In the first section of this chapter I discussed the self-care mindset, a specific way of relating to the self that privileges self-compassion, self-love and acceptance. This mindset and an attitude of awareness of the self and what the self needs seems to be especially important when it comes to mental health.

> "Self-care to me is a very key component to having good mental health. If you're stressed, if you're depressed or anxious and your mind is not in the present and you're not mindful where you are, you're not mindful enough to really take care of yourself." (Donna)

This mindful aspect of self-care is connected to everything else in caring for the self – if one is not present and aware in the mind, one can't listen to what one needs. Katrina said that self-care is a way to be proactive in terms of mental or physical health issues, so that one doesn't get to a point where problems are so severe that treatment is needed. Self-care is also vital when coping with an existing mental health issue or illness. Instagram posts feature ways to care for the self in times of depression and what to do when anxiety hits. Commenters in comment sections thank the poster for their tips, maybe offer some advice from their own experience or relate their current feeling or experience. The stigma mental health issues are perceived to have is a key feature of mental health related self-care discussions. "Ending the stigma" and normalizing mental health issues is an important reason for people to post about their personal experiences with mental health. This includes discussing emotions, normalizing the spectrum of what emotions make us human and are normal. Ideas of positive thinking can be discerned behind this, making it seem like everyone should be happy all the time. Posts countering this idea remind people that all emotions are valid and that no one is happy all the time. Instagram provides a space to discuss mental health and easily find people who have similar experiences with mental health, strangers who might understand one's experiences better than immediate family or friends. There is a community of people sharing their experience, advice, encouragement and sympathy. Normalizing mental health, its upkeep and problems, is a common goal.

"Ending the stigma"

> "It is real, it's important and we have to talk about it, that's the way to, that's like the number one way of ending the mental health stigma is talking about it and being open and being honest because it's not what it looks like on the outside." (Katrina)

There is perceived to be a great difference between the way physical and mental health are talked of in society. Stigma surrounding mental health issues is something that came

up in many discussions. The concept of stigma was famously defined and analyzed by sociologist Erving Goffman in his book *Stigma: Notes on the Management of Spoiled Identity*. Goffman's definitions have greatly influenced understandings of stigma both in academic literature and the wider public (Tyler and Slater 2018:728) Goffman defines stigma as "the situation of the individual who is disqualified from full social acceptance" (Goffman 1963:9). Stigma is according to Goffman not about persons but perspectives, something that is brought about in social situations, and "can function as a means of formal social control" (Goffman 1963:163–65). According to Tyler and Slater two other important claims Goffman made on stigma are in its management through strategies such as concealment and passing, and that forms of stigma are historically distinct. (Tyler and Slater 2018:729)

Donna talked of how mental health wasn't spoken about for a long time, and how that has "come back to bite us in the butt a little bit". Young people are diagnosed with depression and societal pressures take a toll on people. Marketing tells people there is always something wrong with them and through social media and the internet there is so much information coming people's way.

> "It's more prevalent now because we become more aware of it, more people are talking about it and people are actually standing up and saying 'this is not okay'. A lot of people of older generations will say 'well we had that, we just didn't talk about it'. 'Well that's true. But you didn't talk about it so did it get any better? It didn't did it, it got worse.' And now my generation and my kid's generation has been kind of given the repercussions of that." (Donna)

There appears to be this generational change in attitudes and a change happening currently when it comes to mental health stigma. Goffman noted that stigma is generated in social contexts and is historically specific in its forms. In self-care discourse the stigma of mental health is often acknowledged but also attempted to eradicate. There is an understanding that in societies at large there is a great stigma with mental illness but that this is harmful. In self-care discussions mental health and illnesses are talked of freely. In this community there is an attempt to create a social context where there is no stigma when it comes to mental illness and hope for a future where this stigma is absent in wider society as well.

Katrina also spoke of the generational difference regarding mental illness stigma Donna mentioned, adding in her experience as an African American Christian female. She said that there is an especially strong stigma with mental illness within the African American

community and she connected this with American history and generational patterns. Katrina said that in times of slavery people had no voice to speak up and they had to be silent about their issues, noting how much mental health issues people must have in fact had in those times. This silence around mental health then turned into a generational issue. Katrina said that her family didn't talk about mental health when she was growing up. A common response to problems was "go to church, then you pray". Many times people are afraid of other's reactions and are ashamed to look for help elsewhere than from the church. This focus on church as the only aid with mental health issues is something that Katrina acknowledged as common in the African American community in general. A lot of people struggle but are told to only seek help from church, and there isn't always knowledge of the possibilities for treating mental health issues. Katrina said that she likes to use the analogy of physical health to talk to people about this:

> "I like to use the analogy: if you have been diagnosed with cancer, or if you've been diagnosed with high blood pressure or diabetes, yes, pray about it, but you're going to also go see a doctor to help control it and to get some tips and tools to help you know control it. But when it comes to mental health, because I feel like it's not tangible, something you can see, something you can feel it's like not something as important but looking at like 'oh no God should be your source for everything' and he is, but most people don't understand, God could lead you to a therapist or to some type of mental health professional to give that, so you can have a better relationship with Him." (Katrina)

This contradictory relationship of Christianity and mental health issues also came up in my Instagram observations. One account I came across was solely focused on mental health information for Christians and posted things similar to what Katrina said above – for instance that anxiety isn't about not trusting God enough and can be caused by various reasons, including biological ones. It was also noted that people are bio-psycho-spiritual beings, which is one way to frame the earlier discussed body, mind, spirit triad. Donna also talks about the stigma of not needing help when it comes to mental health. She says how where she's from it's seen as much more acceptable to turn to coping mechanisms like alcohol - noting how for women in their 30's it's about "wine o'clock" - than get actual help. One post I came across in Instagram simply stated: "It's not a bad thing to ask for help.", another reminded people suffering from depression to reach out to others. The individualism and idea of self-responsibility in Western societies may create this idea that one needs to cope on their own. Of course, regarding mental illness people also fear being stigmatized, as noted, and don't necessarily ask for help for this reason.

The key way to end the stigma around mental health issues is seen to be talking about it, raising awareness. Goffman talked of managing the effects of stigma, such as concealment and passing. In self-care discourse on mental health there is the idea of doing the opposite: being open about personal struggles in order to normalize them. One Instagrammer posted a picture of herself with a caption that said that therapy doesn't always feel good, it can be exhausting – but ultimately it's good for mental health in the long run. Elena said that people are starting to speak about mental health more and more and that it's not a taboo subject anymore. A shift is happening in society where it is more acceptable to talk about things like self-care and self-love.

> "I'm just trying to end the stigma, because I think that we're all making strides in ending it and it's still there unfortunately but I think that we're moving forward with changing the negative narrative around mental health and self-care" (Katrina)

Foucault's conceptualization of biopower and dividing practices are relevant here. Foucault has traced the genealogy of dividing practices regarding the development of psychiatry and how what is normal and what isn't have been established. A normalizing power was at work in creating mental asylums for instance, creating dividing lines between sanity and insanity. (see Foucault 2001.) Biopower works through regulating people's lives and creating norms (Foucault 1990:144). Talking about mental health is seen as a way of changing norms around it. Mental health issues as something everyone goes through sometimes, such as mild anxiety and depression, can be understood as something that is a normal part of life. Mental illnesses are also attempted to be normalized in the sense that they are compared to physical illnesses, as Katrina did.

One Instagrammer spoke of her own struggle in recognizing that her anxiety wasn't a personal failing and something that needed to be pushed through in order to stay productive. In her post she reminded people that to respect one's limits is to practice self-care. Sharing personal stories of living with mental health issues or mental illnesses is about normalizing them and educating people about mental health. Elena noted how important she deemed it when Prince Harry did a talk on mental health with a UK football team. She said that in the UK the suicide rate is rising higher with men and so speaking about mental health is very important so that people know to get help. She said that having a son she thinks about this a lot and feels it's important she teaches him to talk about his feelings early on. Elena also mentioned she is going to incorporate self-care into raising him. Most of the mental health related self-care content I came across was from women, and therapeutic culture is generally more engaged with by women.

Katrina also said that if she has a family some day, she wants to teach her children about mental health so that certain generational patterns and negative habits around mental health can end, and her children won't have to struggle as she did with her family.

Posts regarding mental health talked of depression, anxiety and other mental health issues. Often posters would share their own experiences. One spoke of her decision to get some extra help with coping with anxiety and going to a doctor. She ended the post with saying that it's okay to realize you need help, be it therapy or medication, and that it's healthy and normal to do so. One person spoke of the demands of her job and that burnout is very common in her field. She spoke of depression and how important it is to care for oneself and each other, followed by tips for combatting depression. Posts with personal stories about mental health often generated responses where commenters would applaud the bravery of the poster and thank them for sharing their point of view, and often also sharing their own struggles with mental health. A post ending with the phrase "educate yourself" had a smiling selfie of a woman, with the text portion explaining that the photo was taken only some hours before she attempted suicide. She elaborated that she has BPD and could go from smiling to suicidal very fast from a small trigger. Comments were in the hundreds, talking about their own experiences with suicidal thoughts or the experiences they had had with loved ones. One commenter said that she also has BPD and her family doesn't believe in mental illness, and when she talks to people about her disorder, they look at her differently. These spaces where someone begins a conversation by sharing personal stories of their own mental health struggles open up opportunities for people to feel accepted, when their "real life" experiences with their mental illness may be those of stigma.

The way constant productivity is seen to be valued in Western societies is combatted in self-care discourse in general, and especially in mental health-related posts. Quotes beginning with "Your mental health is more important than…" following with things such as grocery shopping, a meeting, grades, or an interview, were shared many times. Another repeated quote was:

> "Friendly reminder that 'doing your best' does not mean working yourself to the point of mental breakdown."

These posts are about attempting to counter an idea that it's always necessary to be productive at work or in other social obligations in life. There is a view that what is

valued in wider society, such as busyness which Ehrenreich noted as becoming a marker of status in the 1980's and 1990's, is harmful to the individual's wellbeing, and specifically mental health. One commenter said that they are drained from trying to balance work and family life and that there is a narrative that people should sleep less and work harder in order to show their dedication, and connected this to the rise of mental health problems. One commenter tagged their friend in a post, jokingly saying that even social media is reminding her that she needs days off. Another commenter said that their culture is very goal and achievement orientated. She related how she had decided to turn down a job offer due to it being more demanding than her current job, and she needs rest to cope with her mental and physical illnesses and many people have had difficulty in understanding this. In addition to this idea that individuals have to be constantly productive, especially mental health related posts would counter ideas of self-sufficiency. One Instagram post stated that "It's not a bad thing to ask for help." It was often recognized that this isn't easy, since self-sufficiency is generally valued in society, but that it's very important to do so.

Healing journey

Life in self-care discourse was often referred to as a *journey*. This life-journey is often referred to as having ups and downs. In self-care discourse, especially the hard moments are talked of. Quotes such as "Appreciate where you are in your journey, even if it's not where you want to be. Every season serves a purpose.", "The day you plant the seed is not the day you eat the fruit", "Be patient with yourself" and "Start over as many times as you need to" illustrate an idea of an attitude towards oneself, that is accepting and loving towards the self, even though this moment may be tough. One post was about reminding people that "you're not behind in life" since there is no one way to live. In addition to life in general being referred to as a journey, it's especially used in terms of finding self-care and wellbeing, both through the mindset and practice discussed in the first analysis chapter. It's also a sense of finding and doing self-work. Donna talked of how self-care is a lifelong journey and that there is always work to do with the self. Mia also said that self-love is a journey that you're in for life, not something that will ever be fully accomplished, and the more effort one puts into learning it the easier it will get.

The word *healing* was also used to describe this journey through life. The colloquial meaning would usually suggest an illness that is healed from and sometimes it was used thus on Instagram. More often it was used more generally however, often referring to

healing emotionally from difficult experiences and emotional pain. Posts would be reminders, such as "You are more than your pain" and "I hope that you become filled with so much happiness that it heals every part of you." It was noted that "healing takes time" and "things take time". Others concentrated on this moment, saying "just enjoy where you are now". Another simply said "keep going" with the caption text saying, that the poster sees how their readers are healing, fighting, and growing. Posts also reminded that everyone grows at their own pace and that this is okay. Healing was also referred to as something that is difficult and takes work. One post was about how draining healing can be. The word *recovery* was also used in a similar sense as healing. This quote illustrates the relation of self-care, healing and life as a journey, and the compassionate attitude towards oneself:

> "Fall in love with taking care of yourself. Fall in love with the path of healing. Fall in love with becoming the best version of yourself but with patience, with compassion and respect to your own journey." – s.mcnutt

The way my interviewees recounted when and why they started to practice self-care show a certain rupture in the way the self was related to "before and after" self-care. Most had some sort of difficult life event or stressful time that had made them turn to look for ways forward, and discovered self-care. Elena and Katrina spoke of feeling depleted at work. Elena is secondary school teacher and was working in schools where she got really stressed, which led to low energy, insomnia and low self-esteem. She found out about self-care from her course to become a health coach, of which she learned of from a friend. Katrina heard about self-care for the first time in college but started applying it after she had graduated.

> "I felt myself starting to get burned out too soon. But I loooved therapy and thought 'oh my goodness I don't want to hate my job, but I'm tired, I don't know why, I don't know how to balance this'. And colleagues would talk about self-care and then I started researching it more, because it was not only something I wanted to learn but also I wanted to teach my clients." (Katrina)

Anne discovered self-care in the midst of a difficult family situation, when her partner's daughter passed away and in addition to grief over the loss, her partner had heart problems resulting in many doctor's visits and hospital stays. She said that they had to find some way to cope with everything that was happening, and she found and started to practice self-care as a way to handle the situation. For Donna it was severe postpartum depression and anxiety that made her look into self-scare. She said that she tried to fight the situation naturally at first, by eating healthy and exercising, but when her condition

worsened she started therapy and medication and started researching self-care and mental health; “how to take care of ourselves and the importance of taking care of ourselves and how our brains are wired and how we can rewire them” (Donna).

Community and advice

The social media platform is a space for people who suffer from mental health problems to talk with people who have similar experiences. This is something that they necessarily can’t find in their “real life” social circle. It was brought up in Instagram discussions that many people don’t know how to sympathize with someone who has mental health issues or don’t understand them. Social media can serve as a vent, providing a place to discuss these things with others who have been through similar things and understand, even though the conversation may be limited to a few comments between people who will likely never converse more than that. A comment also doesn’t necessarily generate responses and that isn’t necessarily the reason to comment. These spaces can create the feeling of being seen, that one’s experience is valid, and others have similar ones. The relative anonymity might also make it easier to enter into discussions.

One very lengthy comment section discussion was about the ways people often don’t know how to relate to someone with a mental illness and how this can make one feel. Commenters shared things they had been told that were perhaps attempting to be sympathetic but came out as dismissive. Some of the phrases shared were: “happiness is a choice” or “just pray about it”, “move on”, “you’re fine”, “you think too much”, “you’ll get better soon” (said to a person with chronic illnesses), “you’re too young to feel like that”, “never give up”, “it could always be worse”, “you don’t seem like you have a mental illness, you seem so upbeat” or “it’s all in your mind”.

These posts aren’t however only for those who suffer from mental health issues but can help those who want to learn how to react when someone near them is having a difficult time. One commenter said that he screenshot a post for discussions with his wife in the future. Someone said they’re going to give a post to their husband. Another thanked for the post, saying that sometimes it’s hard to know what to say to someone when they need a little support. Someone tagged a friend, saying that this community has great information on supporting someone with mental illness, remembering the friend had sometimes said they often don’t know what to say to someone struggling. Someone said

more generally that many people don't know how to talk about these kinds of things and are left speechless or say something that ultimately someone suffering feels to be dismissive.

The stigma and ignorance about mental illnesses are probably major reasons for the prevalence of promoting self-care for mental health. There is not that much stigma or misunderstandings regarding physical illness (though some discussions about other 'invisible illnesses' than mental health related ones occurred in my observations too, and were similar to those regarding mental illness), and most people are at least roughly aware of what taking care of the physical aspect of health entails; that it's important to exercise and eat nutritious food. What taking care of mental health can entail hasn't been widely discussed for very long, probably due to the stigma.

Posts offered advice, encouragement, information and reminders on the mental aspect of self-care and coping with mental illnesses. These could be as simple as eating, getting out of bed, taking a shower or texting a loved one. Advice isn't always only distributed one-way, from the original poster to their audience. In the comment sections people ask questions, sometimes from the poster but often in general from someone who might see their comment. Strangers ask and give advice to each other. Some people share their personal situations and ask if others have advice. Some pieces of advice from commenters to coping with declining mental health included journaling, seeing a professional therapist or doctor, having some fresh air, concentrating on breathing, and talking to someone one trusts about how one is feeling.

Katrina, whose day job is working as a therapist, is known for giving out advice and information on mental health and self-care. She said that people reach out to her relatively often and ask for help. This is in fact a reason that she started her brand where she shares self-care and mental health resources on her website and Instagram. She said that his is her way to help people on a broader sense, since she can't provide therapy for everyone. She for instance provides resources on finding therapists and goes out to speak about mental health and self-care. Katrina notes however, that there is a limit to what she can do online, especially when people reach out to her via Instagram DM's asking for help. She stressed that she is not an "Instagram therapist" she can't and doesn't provide therapy online (noting that there are online therapists who provide actual online therapy, but this a different thing). She shares advice, in the form of quotes

and lists for example, but also reminds people that these resources are not an exact way of diagnosing yourself and if behaviors are worsening, it's important to go find professional help. The tools she shares are supplemental resources, Katrina notes they cannot be someone's only way of working through trauma. However, therapy is expensive, and it might take time to get to therapy, so these tools can help meanwhile.

> "Instagram is not a place for therapy, it's just a lot of information you can gather to help you get an idea, engage what you needs are, but if it worsens you definitely need to go seek help. I don't want them to rely just on the internet because there's so much information to absorb and then you start comparing yourself, and you start feeling like 'oh my gosh, I'm not doing this, I'm not doing that' and it's like 'no, no, no don't feel like you have to be doing everything'. I try to stick to only posting things I feel like I'm qualified in, which is why I provide practical mental health tools and self-care tools." (Katrina)

Emotions and positivity

Many posts that were hashtagged with #mentalillness simply discussed emotions. Posters wanted to remind people of the variety of human emotions and that they are all a normal part of life. The ways the ideology of positive thinking has affected behavioral norms can be traced at the background of this, since there seems to be a need to remind people they aren't always required to be happy - that it's normal to feel sad or angry. One Instagrammer posted a picture herself crying, asking rhetorically for its de-stigmatizing, saying that crying is a normal part of being human and that some people cry a lot, other less, and all this is fine. One commenter said that it feels amazing to be reminded that this is normal. Someone shared facts about tears and the beneficial effects of crying. Others spoke of their experiences as people who cry a lot and have been made to feel this isn't normal. Someone did comment that taking a selfie of crying and posting it online is very "cringey" to them, but this person was in a minority in the commenters. One post reminded people that there isn't always a reason for feelings, that they just *are* sometimes. Another said that people aren't supposed to always be happy, but experience all emotions, pleasure and pain in order to grow. Another simply stated: "It's okay to feel sad.".

Positivity is related to in ambiguous ways in self-care discussions. There are many accounts on Instagram solely dedicated to positivity and the power of positive thinking. Thoughts on positivity are also shared on self-care -related pages to some extent. However, as in the above posts, self-care discussions often address positivity in a

reflexive manner. Positivity is sometimes seen to not allow "negative" emotions and is perceived as belittling people's experiences, especially when it comes to mental health issues that the power of positive thinking cannot fix. Donna said that she finds it important to "see both sides" regarding emotions and positivity.

> "I think it is important to see both sides. If we see something sad I think we should embrace that sadness but I think there comes a point when we need to say 'okay I let myself be sad and now I need to move forward' and try to find the positivity of trying to find the good there which can be really hard." (Donna)

Donna goes on to say that positivity is important to her, but that doesn't mean that she doesn't let herself feel emotions that are perceived as negative too. She says that it is important to accept that it's normal to grieve a loss or a life change for example, but then move on. In coping with these kinds of feelings Donna journals and lets herself cry, which is a kind of self-work. In a similar vein, one Instagram post featured the text: "Feel what you need to feel and then let it go. Do not let it consume you." (Dhiman). This idea of letting go is important in Buddhist thought, where it is believed that everything is impermanent and this needs to be accepted (Cassaniti 2015:2–3). This is another example of the way different religious traditions mix in current wellness discussions, which Sointu noted in her discussion on holistic health practices regarding spirituality. (Sointu 2012:170)

Dani says that positivity is an essential aspect of wellbeing for her. She notes that it doesn't come easily for her to be positive but it is something she strives for. She related that she feels that negativity drains her energy and doesn't add value to her life. One drawing I came across on Instagram features an image of a spray bottle saying it is to be used to erase negative thoughts. In the caption the poster of this image says that she has recently received some not very good news and says that in such times it can be hard to keep happy, but that she can choose to dwell on this news or shut down the negative thoughts and move on. In one post the phrase "good vibes only" was pondered upon, saying that it can feel like one should always be happy and positive, and shouldn't have vibes that are sad or angry. This post generated a lot of conversation and multiple responses. Some agreed wholeheartedly, others voiced their opinion that positivity doesn't mean one has to always be happy.

In conclusion, self-care discussions promote the validity of all feelings. Often this is done through reminding people that it's okay to feel angry or sad, or other feelings that

are perceived as negative. There is perceived to be a large stigma regarding mental illness, but also part of the spectrum of emotions. Both are attempted to normalize though posting stories of personal experiences, reminders, advice and encouragement. These discussions are also a space for people that have mental health issues to find people with similar experiences and feel a sense of community.

5. Self and others

5.1 Relationship between self and others

In the individualism in Western thought there is a separation, and relationship, between the self and society. This relationship is something that is very much talked of and negotiated online. In this section I will investigate the way the relationship between self and others is framed in self-care discourse. This section is more about the self and others and society at a general level, with the next section concentrating on how women, who are the vast majority of self-care advocates, view their role in the family and in society.

Boundaries

Perhaps the most repeated concept that comes up in self-care discussions regarding relationships is *boundaries*. "Boundaries are self-care" came up in different variations many times during the research. The idea of boundaries is embedded in the idea that the individual is immersed in a web of social obligations and that individual needs are often left as second to the needs of others. One post advised people in how to say "no" to people, noting that it can make one feel guilty to turn things down, but that it's important to set boundaries and learn to say "no", especially if one is a "people-pleaser". Another also reminded readers that it's okay to say "no", to rest and stop, because one's own wellbeing is more important sometimes. One poster declared to no longer respond to "energy vampires" who want the person's energy in exchange for nothing. In another, setting boundaries was framed as protecting "your spirit and your aura" from people who have no boundaries themselves. In one post it was said that you can love someone or something, while setting limits with them. Commenters on boundary-related posts shared their struggles with keeping boundaries. One commenter spoke of her difficult situation with her parents being sick, her mother then dying and taking care of her father as well as her own children, saying she loves them but that not

having time to meet any of her own needs is destroying her, and then she won't be there for anyone. One said that she needs self-care without feeling guilty about it, noting how long it's been since she's put her own needs first. Someone opened up about how hard it is to set boundaries and keep at them. Another said she put herself and her boundaries first when she quit her job where she had a disrespectful supervisor. This post entitled "my boundaries" lists ways the artist keeps her boundaries.

Image courtesy of Matilda @crazyheadcomics

In their analysis of bestseller self-help books, Salmenniemi and Pessi note that reflecting on the relationship of the self to the social world is a common way of striving to understand the self in self-help. They say that in the books selfhood is framed as being socially constructed. It is influenced by society, social interactions and cultural frameworks. But whether this social construction of the self is seen in a positive or negative light depended on the book in question. In some, society and socialization are framed negatively as being harmful to the individual. The stress of society makes people ill, and an inward turn is what helps find the natural self, truly become oneself. (Salmenniemi and Pessi 2017:4–5.) The truth is found inside, not from outside authorities (2017:5). There is a stress on not depending on anyone for happiness (2017:6). One's own needs and wants should be most important and self-help readers are told to detach from other people to find wellbeing (2017:7). In other manuals,

especially Nordic ones in Pessi and Salmenniemi's research, society and sociality were framed as being supportive to selfhood. The self is seen as entrenched is social relations, and that as well as societal institutions are seen as bringing more wellbeing, not taking away from it. (2017:5.) These manuals criticize the idea that people should get by on their own, that people are in fact dependent of others. Especially in these Nordic works there is a critique of the individualism and consumerism in Western society. (2017:6.)

In self-care discourse it is acknowledged that people are entrenched is social relations. How this sociality is framed had some variety in different posts, but there was a general tendency to point out that social obligations can have a negative impact on wellbeing, if one doesn't consciously make an effort to take care of themselves first. The illustration entitled "my boundaries" illuminates this. The general idea of the six points on boundaries seem to portray others negatively. Standing up for myself, not depending on others for happiness and not letting others guilt or manipulate me, frame others as being a force that may negatively affect the individual if they don't remember their boundaries, to take care of themselves first. One quote urged people to "exist loudly", elaborating that one shouldn't have to minimize oneself in order to make others feel more comfortable. A similar quote on the same page urged to not shrink oneself for others comfort if they refuse to grow. In another post on self-growth, one commenter asked for advice for being the only one who is "growing" in their relationship. A few others commented with a "me too", and someone asked whether the person has communicated this will for growth with their partner and if they have refused growth opportunities, and if so, they themselves would walk away.

These views align with the first ones in Pessi and Salmenniemi's research, where the social life is framed negatively, and happiness is seen as something that shouldn't depend on anyone but the self. Quotes such as "Create your own happiness" and "To be happy is a great decision" frame happiness as something that the individual can do – a choice, the idea of which Cederström and Spicer criticized, since it effaces the outer circumstances of life and society. Elena also said that she has learned that you are in control of your own happiness. Though people can make one happy, this isn't sustainable on the long run. It wouldn't be fair for a partner or child be what makes a person happy, since it's such a big thing.

Health and happiness are seen to be in the individual's control. This is also why it's so important to "Make yourself a priority" and "Protect your energy". The caption for the latter said that it isn't rude to remove oneself from situations or people that are draining. The picture with the quote features a woman in a wheelchair. Another post listed things that it's okay to do to protect one's energy, such as not answer a call, change one's mind, cancel a commitment and not share oneself. One quote proclaimed that "self-control is strength", saying that one should get to a point where one's mood isn't influenced by someone else's actions. Sometimes quotes from famous thinkers were shared, such as "I think it's very healthy to spend time alone. You need to know how to be alone and not be defined by another person" (Oscar Wilde) and "Do not let the behaviour of others destroy your inner peace." (Dalai Lama). The relationship with the self is especially valued, as in:

> "You are the only person you need to be good enough for."
>
> "Your relationship with yourself sets the tone for every other relationship you have". (Robert Holden)

Relationships in self-help books are often framed similarly. Hazleden examined self-help books focused on (romantic) relationships (Hazleden 2003:413). She notes that though these books are focused on finding a partner, the focus is usually in nurturing the self, not advice on how to meet potential partners or how to find love (2003: 415). As in the above quotes, the second which I discovered to be from self-help author Robert Holden, developing a romantic relationship is assumed to begin with the self. Hazleden argues that the self-help reader is "provided with a new ethical identity" (2003: 416). The reader might have begun reading with the assumption that the problem is in their relationship, but the self-help manuals would assure that it is fact with the reader themselves. The self is then "of primary ethical significance" – it's the readers identity that is relevant to finding a relationship. The reader has an ethical duty to cultivate their relationship with the self first. (2003: 416.)

The prizing of the relationship with the self is currently articulated through the concept of self-love. Though my focus during this research was in the concept of self-care, I couldn't escape posts about self-love. The relatedness of the two concepts was confirmed in the interviews. Anne said that when a person heads down the path of self-care, they also learn self-love. Elena said that in caring for herself she is also showing herself that she loves herself. Hannah said that you are the only person that there will be

in the end and beginning of your life, and so you yourself should be your best friend. Lena said that nowadays people seem to say "zero f's given" a lot, but argued that they miss the point of self-love and self-care in this, since this means that one does care about what others think. She connected this idea of truly not caring what others think with self-confidence, saying that these are the people we tend to look up to. Lena also said that she has experienced expectations and judgement from friends and family that was not asked for. There's a need to separate one's own relationship to oneself from these others. However, Lena concluded this answer with telling an anecdote from one of her classes with adults. She said that when her students would be sitting slouched, just looking at their phones, she would sometimes get everyone to stand up straight and look in another person's eye for a minute and when they were done, the students would tell her how energized they feel. This brings to mind the way Grodin analyses women's reading of self-help. Though the books are often very individual-focused, women also found that the books didn't address social relationships in ways that were meaningful to them. The readers felt that the books didn't address an integration between the ideal of independence and autonomy and meaningful connection with others. (Grodin 1991:416.) Similar thoughts were voiced in other studies focusing on reader interaction with self-help, such as Lichterman's. Similarly Lena talks in terms of self-care discourse, prizing the individual and stressing a need for separation of oneself from the expectations from others, but in the same breath speaks of the way a shared exercise, including a connection through looking someone in the eye, brought joy to all participants.

Social through the self

Social life in self-care discourse is looked at from the individual's perspective. Phrases starting with "surround yourself" included surrounding oneself with others who add value to one's life and people who aren't only there when it shines, but also when it rains. Another related in a joking manner, that its funny how surrounding oneself with kind-hearted, positive and loving people improves life quality. It was noted that it's impossible to change the people around you, but it's possible to choose who to be around. In one post this was framed as some people needing to "lose all access to you" for good and without explanations. Posts beginning with "unavailable for…" and "I am no longer available for..." listed things such as, negativity, what's draining, toxic things and things that make me feel like sh*t. In one caption it was written that everyone has

people in their lives that don't understand them, and we should not waste our energy on them, but wish them well from afar and concentrate on living our own life, concluding that this is big self-care.

As noted before, one of the categories of self-care is divided into is social self-care. Anne said that everyone needs time with friends, such as just playing cards and laughing. Donna also stressed the need for connection, saying that in this age of technology people lack real connection and it's important for her to spend time with her girlfriends. Sociality was thus framed through the individual's need for connection. Sociality is seen as an important part of human life, but it is often seen as something that is good for the individual. The social is seen as more in service of the self. This is similar to how Woodstock analyses how relationships are perceived in self-help books. She notes that though self-help books often have individualistic messages, this doesn't mean that sociality is not deemed important, but that "relationships can be cultivated, maintained, and improved primarily through individual means, through mental thought processes rather than through social interaction". (Woodstock 2007:168.)

Here it might be useful to mirror this idea to views of the self, social and what is understood to generate wellbeing, in another setting. Michael Jackson writes of wellbeing in a strikingly different context to that of the affluent Western societies this thesis is focused on. His fieldwork was in Sierra Leone, according to UN the "least liveable" country in the world. Though it isn't necessarily useful to compare Western societies of individualism and "others" that are relational and dependent on social interaction, I hope Jackson's remarks on wellbeing for the Kuranko in Sierra Leone to illustrate the particularity of the view of the relationship between the self and social in these Western-originating self-care discussions.

According to Jackson, the Kuranko he conducted ethnography among, prize social health over psychological or physical health in their conceptions of wellbeing. What is important is one's ability to cultivate social relationships with others. What one actually feels and thinks is less important than a semblance of social harmony. This is quite contrary to the search for authenticity and individualism in current Western societies. For the Kuranko personal emotions are understood to have the potential to disrupt social relationships. This is why traditionally marriages for the Kuranko are not made because of love, but for political reasons. (Jackson 2011:24.) In self-care discussions and self-

help as discussed, the stance is quite opposite. Relationships are something that can be gone into only once one is emotionally and mentally familiarized with the self. And in social relationships it is the individual's needs that are relevant more than social harmony. In fact social harmony is presented as coming from everyone taking care of themselves before others. Jackson reminds his readers that the Kuranko sense of valuing social amity over individual emotions doesn't meant the Kuranko are devoid of feeling. Similarly as the Western ethos of individuality doesn't mean people aren't invested in their family lives or have no collective spirit. (2011:25.)

Though many Instagram posts stressed the individual's wellbeing and self-growth as the starting point of social relationships, and relationships having a potentially draining or negative impact on the self, other posts acknowledged the importance of sociality. One post reminded that we were never meant to do everything alone and we don't have to. Another urged to accept compliments as well as criticism, saying that sun and rain both are needed for a flower to grow. In one post the person said they are impressed by the way someone treats other people, not their status or money. Another said that it's not always the other person who has toxic traits, sometimes it's you. This is a straightforward commentary on the views of other people quoted above, where there is a sense that the other person is draining your energy, being negative or "toxic". The relationships between the self and others are continuously negotiated in self-care discussions.

Views of society

There seems to be a general view in self-care discourse that current lives in Western societies are especially taxing. Dani said that wellbeing is currently a trend because people around the world are feeling inundated and overwhelmed. Wellbeing is about coping with the stress that comes from the excessive amounts of information, as well opportunities in some cases, that are available to people. Dani added that she does think people have been under stress before as well, but now especially with the rise of the internet people discuss these topics more. The more people talk about experiences like anxiety and depression, others realize they have similar experiences and speak out as well. Lena said that wellbeing and to be able to think about it is a privilege. To live in a country that is in peace and to have opportunities to find work can determine how much someone is able to concentrate on self-care. She said that she feels many cultures in fact incorporate self-care better than Western ones, where there are many expectations

on people's performances at work and in life. One Instagram post addressing "fellow millennials" stated that it's good for your mental health to do things for yourself without monetizing it or having to make others happy. Elena thought that there has been a shift in society, that everything is so fast paced now

A view of the past as a simpler time compared to a stressful present is discernable in these accounts. Salmenniemi and Pessi recognize this longing for a romanticized past, where current Western lives are seen as taxing to the individual (Salmenniemi and Pessi 2017:4). In the portion of the books Salmenniemi and Pessi analyzed that saw the social world as detrimental to the individual self, societal institutions appear as oppressing to the individual (2017: 5). Many of these works also assume a sense of political powerlessness. If society itself is difficult to change, it is better to change oneself than do nothing. (2017: 9.) This provides people with a sense of agency (Salmenniemi and Vorona 2014: 55). The fragmentation of social life coupled with possibilities for connection unimaginable some decades ago is what Giddens denotes as the reason that self-identity in what he terms late modernity is a becomes "a reflexively organized endeavor" (Giddens 1991:5).

As Salmenniemi and Pessi describe views of society as harmful to the individual, the concentration on the self is often seen in social scientific research as something that prevents making social and political change (e.g. Rimke). This is rather far from Audre Lorde's proclamation, quoted in the beginning of this thesis: "Caring for myself is not self-indulgence, it is self-preservation, and that is an act of political warfare." Lorde's proclamation is more in line with the way Foucault looked at caring for the self in Greek Antiquity as an ethical act that enabled political activities. Caring for the self and contemplation where the prerequisite for becoming a just ruler, for taking care of others (Foucault 1988b:8.). Occupation on the self and political activities weren't framed as opposites, but as interconnected. Then again, caring for the self in itself, not only for the benefit of others was according to Foucault ethical in itself. (Foucault 1988b:7.) Currently it is argued that the focus on the self in wellness interventions and therapeutic technologies effaces the power of political change, since both all problems and solutions are to be found in the self. I will come back to this argument in the next chapter, in the ways themes of empowerment of women are present in self-care discussions.

5.2 Women in society

Most of the people engaged in self-care discussions are women. In my research I only encountered a few accounts and posts by men. There might have been more men in the commenters but based on ID's commenters were quite often women as well. All of my interviewees were women. This predominance is why I dedicate this subchapter to the perceived relationship and power structures between women and society. Most of my interviewees stated that self-care was in their opinion equally important for men and women. However, they perceived that women talk about it more. This was also visible regarding mental health – my interviewees thought that it would be important for emotions and mental health to be more discussed for men as well. The way it was perceived that women talk more about topics like self-care, emotions and mental health, was seen as positive. But the way women are portrayed in society was deemed as problematic, more so than for how men are seen. The way certain beauty standards and beauty seen as a major defining quality for women in general was seen as harmful to women. In self-care discussions themes of self-love, body positivity, and accepting oneself, work to counter these harmful (body) ideals. Women as observed on Instagram and my interviewees saw that there is a clear connection between pressures on physical appearance and the kind of imagery of women present in media, advertising, and social media. In addition to looks, motherhood was also an area where it was deemed that there are specific expectations of women that there aren't for men as fathers. Having children constantly craving attention, it was seen as specifically important for mothers to remember caring for the self and not only for others. It was understood that it is thought that mothers should primarily take care of others, so to say that mothers should care for themselves first is a reframing of what it means to be good mother. It was however perceived that this view is still a minority in society at large and that many people still think mothers should primarily take care of their families. This is of course something that varies between societies and cultural models, so generalizations are rather big. Changing roles between men and women were also discussed in regard to family and work life. Women can have families as well as careers and still want time for themselves. Many metaphors, such as "Fill your own cup first" address this.

Care for yourself like you care for others

Variations of taking care of oneself like one cares for others, and then again the need to take care of oneself *first* in order to be able to care for others, abound in social media self-care discourse.

> "You can't pour from an empty cup. Take care of yourself first."
>
> "Rest and self-care are so important. When you take time to replenish your spirit, it allows you to serve others from the overflow. You cannot serve from an empty vessel." (Eleanor Brown)
>
> "An empty lantern provides no light. Self-care is the fuel that allows your light to shine brightly."

These quotes and the like are much shared on Instagram. Here the self is referred to as a cup, a vessel, and a lantern. In other posts taking care of the self was compared to charging a phone battery, with the words; "you wouldn't let this happen to your phone, don't let it happen to yourself". Self-care is what fills the cup, the self, with energy that is drained by obligations and sometimes other people, as the earlier discussion on boundaries illustrated. One sharer of one of the above quotes related their experience over the last months. They felt like they had been taking care of everything and everyone and felt depleted, which resulted in impatience and shortness. They concluded that they are now training for their cup to never go empty so that they can always feel compassionate towards others.

Caring for the self was seen as especially relevant for women who are often perceived as caring for others, and even more so for mothers. Anne talked of the responsibilities people have, especially when a person grows older and has children. It's easy to get exhausted, which Anne says she definitely was with everything going on in her life. To be able to deal with everything, it is necessary to take care of oneself in addition to looking after others. Anne didn't necessarily perceive there to be a gender difference when it comes to needing self-care but noted that this depends on family roles - whether the woman is the only one cooking, cleaning and taking care of children.

> "Our lives are so big; you're being pulled in 58 different directions every day, so you need a reprieve or an outlet. That's important because you're going to crash if you try to be Wonder Woman. Maybe that's why self-care is becoming more and more well-known." (Anne)

An Instagram post talked of this in terms of the hectic societies people live in. "An eternal to-do list" may make people forget themselves and to take care of themselves.

The poster said that taking time for oneself may feel indulgent, but that this is necessary for health and happiness. It was often purported that caring for the self first may make one feel guilty or selfish, but that in fact through doing so one is not only helping oneself but others as well.

Foucault identified part of the reason for the shift in seeing caring for the self as an ethical act in Antiquity to something that can be perceived as outside of morals to Christianity, where self-renunciation was the goal of practices of the self. (Foucault 1988a:40.) Also Western secular traditions place law as a basis for morality, thus morals are in the social. Morals were to be found in relations with others, in deciding on common rules and external laws. Turning inwards was like turning away from morals. (1988a:22.) The way self-care is often proclaimed as something to do *without* feeling guilty makes sense in this background. The assumption that self-care is thought to be generally understood as something that is selfish is a reason for the reminders to people that it is fact not so. The ethical substance is being shifted. Similarly as taking care of the self was for Socrates a way to benefit the whole city, taking care of the self is framed as the ethical thing to do to be able to care for others. (Foucault 1988a:20). This shift is especially relevant when it comes to motherhood.

Motherhood

According to Donna US society puts pressure especially on women. Women are expected to excel in all their roles. As women they should be attractive and sexy and as a mother sacrifice everything for their children. Elena, who lives in the UK, also said that views of women from the media give out a message of women becoming wives and mothers and that they should take care of others, not themselves.

> "We're the caregivers and we feel that it might be selfish to put ourselves first. But it's so important that if you look after yourself first, then you get the energy to help others. And I found it really interesting that a lot of my female friends, we all feel the same, we're just starting to realize that it's okay to put yourself first, it's not actually selfish." (Elena)

Elena's quote illustrates well this growing awareness that things can be done differently, that women don't always only have to look for others. It also illustrates the relationship between discourse and society. Elena uses phrases that are common in online self-care discourse. She has adopted these new ideas and relates that many of her friends are as

well. There seems to be an on-going negotiation of these roles and relationships between self and others that self-care discourse is entrenched in.

In Instagram posts this was especially visible in terms of what makes a good mother. One post asked the question "Want to be a good mom?" with the answer being "Take care of yourself" adding in ways to do this, such as getting a babysitter, running, crying, working, being alone – whatever one needs. "Mom guilt" was addressed in multiple posts, such as urging people to take care of themselves because if moms get no time for themselves, they will get burned out. Commenters agreed, saying that when you take care of yourself you can raise kids that become the best versions of themselves. Another said that she sometimes feels so guilty taking care of herself, that feels she should take care of her child 24/7. Someone commented that self-care is so important since you can't take care of others if you're not at your best. One post stated that self-care is just not giving into mom guilt. Another reminded people that "you are a good mom".

This thematic of what it means to be a good mother and its negotiation mirrors the shifting social roles of women. Donna recounted the difference between herself as a mother and her own mother. She said that her mother felt that a good mother sacrifices everything for her children and can't have anything to herself. Even now when her children are adults, she needs to justify doing something just for her. Donna said that when she tells her mother that she is having a girl's night out for the second time in two weeks, telling her this is part of her social self-care, her mother questions this asking whether her children and husband are okay with her going out. Donna said that if it were her husband they were talking about, there would be no question of whether it's okay. However, Donna also spoke of the way men as well have certain images and roles they should conform to. This is to do with being masculine in a way of not discussing emotions or having "manly" hobbies such as fishing, cooking and carpentry. Donna said that with her husband who's in the military there is very much a need to give out a certain image of "hardness", where he doesn't tell his friends about his hobbies that might be considered feminine, such as painting, or how he writes love letters to his wife.

Self-care was also something that was integrated into raising children by my interviewees.

> "I think it's really important the younger we learn about self-care. My son's three so he's a little young to be starting meditation but when he's a little bit older I will talk to him

> about breathing to help him calm down and I'll speak to him more about spirituality as he gets older. I think the younger you start it just becomes a way of life." (Elena)

Elena recognizes the importance of teaching children self-care at a young age. Lena said that in her generation themes of self-care and self-love were not part of bringing up children, and that even though as adults people have turned out well, "we all still struggle" and remember conversations with older generations. Similarly, Katrina spoke of wanting to raise possible future children differently than she was raised. Donna said she explains self-care to her children as doing something nice for yourself and giving yourself a hug. One of her children has some tendency towards anxiety and having things perfect and she is teaching him mindfulness and things he likes that he can use to take care of himself.

There is perceived to be a generational shift in what makes a good mother or how children should be raised. My interviewees saw themselves as part of a new generation that prized caring for the self more than the roles they might have in their family lives. Self-care is also something to be incorporated into family life, as Elena's quote illustrated. There is a shift from seeing self-care and concentrating on the self as selfish and harmful to others to self-care as an ethical act that is for the good of others as well as the self.

> "I like to look at self-care as something that I practice unapologetically, because it's not selfish, it's not something I will never be ashamed of, self-care is simply putting me first so I can be there for others." (Katrina)

Self-love and body positivity

> "I like myself in spite of everything I've been taught by media to hate myself about."

Pressures that especially women are perceived to face in Western societies have a lot to do with outer appearances. The way women are portrayed in media and marketing is often seen to emphasize looks. My interviewees did say that there are pressures for men as well. Donna said that for women pressures are concentrated on their bodies, and for men it is more to do with being masculine, as noted before. Mia said that there are expectations about men's appearances too; the ideal male body is very jacked and there must be many pressures to look similar to celebrities. However, in my conversation with Mia and Ellie it was brought up that even though men that are celebrities are often buff, admirable men come in many forms. They are also men who have been successful,

smart, and innovative in their fields. Especially in the past women have been seen primarily thorough what their bodies look like, and there are more images of women out there where women are objectified through their body.

Mia and Ellie had personal experiences of how media imagery of women had affected them as young women. Even though there wasn't a social media in the way there currently is when they were teenagers, a view of what the ideal woman should look like came from magazines, television and Victoria's Secret catalogues. Mia had severe anorexia as a teenager and related how she put all her worth in her weight and had a very unhealthy relationship with food and exercise. Even though she was severely underweight and hospitalized in and out for her condition, she got positive feedback from her peers at school for how she looked. She says that the views of "perfection" that came from the outside are distorted, making her believe she would be happier if she was thinner. Ellie said that even though she didn't necessarily have an eating disorder, she had a negative perception of herself and of her looks growing up. She remembers being angry at herself for not being thinner and would view exercise as a punishment for eating "badly". Mia's comment summarizes the influence media has on young women and girls and how self-care and self-love are ways to counter this and provide an alternative narrative.

> "When I was at my most vulnerable social media was just starting, I was 12-15. It was hard enough back then; I can't imagine now. The influence that celebrities in particular have on people and how they view themselves, I think it's huge and it only makes it more important to value and really try to practice self-love and self-care." (Mia)

There is a need to disengage with certain ideas of what a woman should be. It's almost 30 years since Grodin wrote in her article that self-help provided women a way to resist patriarchy. Grodin writes that self-help was both a course of connection and disconnection for female readers. Connection was desired in that there was an abstract idea for the women reading that they have something in common with other readers. Disconnection was present in the sense that reading self-help was used in extrication from patriarchy. Readers felt a need to separate themselves from traditional views of women, and might disconnect with people in their lives they saw as purporting harmful views. (Grodin 1991:416.)

My interviewees detected that there is change happening in the kind of imagery provided of women. Elena mentioned that she has recently seen adverts on tv that show women of all shapes and sizes, and different ethnicities and says that the more this

image is shown on media, the more people will start to realize that there are many "normals", not only the one way to look as a woman. This is what the body positivity movement, which is especially alive online, is about – that all bodies are good bodies. The gist as understood through my online observations is in quotes such as this: "I can feel good in my body, without considering its appearance." Mia defined body positivity for her as accepting that the body changes and to focus on what the body can *do* rather than what it looks like. The body enables her to hike, climb mountains and spend time with family, and is strong and capable. Mia said that it isn't always easy to remember this, but it's what she tries to do.

> "Usually I think about the basic of it's keeping me alive - how can I hate something that's keeping me alive and that's keeping me healthy and able?" (Mia)

Ellie added that she had recently learned about the term "body neutrality" where the idea is to not put so much worth in the body, but in the other capabilities one has. The two Instagrammers concluded that they feel it is important to put less emphasis on appearances and more on other qualities on has, but that the body positivity movement also has an empowering idea, that sometimes it's nice to feel beautiful and in this sense also concentrate on looks. Instagram posts addressed these ideas in many ways. Often they were similar to what Mia and Ellie said. People would tell personal stories about their relationships with their bodies, often recalling that when they were younger, they were very critical of the ways they looked and are now learning to embrace themselves. Often it was about weight or how thin one should be, other times it was cellulite and stretch marks that are also being normalized as part of what a woman looks like.

One reason to practice self-love, as well as self-care, is to be able to extricate from these societal pressures and focus on women's appearance. My interviewees defined self-love as truly loving yourself, accepting all parts of oneself when times are good and when times are difficult. This is something that is assumed to be difficult in current society, where it is perceived that advertising and media purport specific views of what a person should be, and in general there is a lot of comparison and judgement. Donna describes how advertising uses self-care as a way to sell expensive beauty products, noting that putting on moisturizer is a form of self-care, taking care of one's skin, but in fact the advertisement is telling the person they have saggy skin which must be taken care of.

> "I feel like with true self-care there's body positivity and acceptance, but I see how marketers are trying to use it to still give that whole thing of how we're not supposed to age, we're not supposed to have grey hair. I believe all self-care comes

> down to misconceptions and limiting beliefs we have about our self. It all comes down to self-love, loving ourselves, a lot of us don't love ourselves deep down." (Donna)

Self-love was defined as truly loving oneself. It was often brought up how strange it is that this is so hard. Often it was perceived that loving others is easy but loving the self less so. Hannah brought up that it's strange we are so critical of ourselves and not of our best friends, saying that achieving self-love isn't necessarily loving yourself like your best friend, since you should already be your own best friend – "because you are the only person that is there in the end and at the beginning". Similarly to self-care, self-love was also seen as the way to love others.

> "Self-love is truly loving yourself. I think being able to say that you love yourself, people might think you might be vain or they see it in a negative way, but you've got to be able to love yourself first, before you can love others. I think the message about self-love is starting to come through in a more positive light and people are getting more able to embrace it and being able to say that they do love themselves and I think through the self-care and eating healthily et cetera you are showing yourself that you love yourself by doing those things." (Elena)

Ellie said that she had recently read a quote from author Brené Brown that said that people who like themselves don't judge other people. She said that this really resonated with her, since when one feels good about oneself and loves oneself, one treats others better as well. She said that it's similar to wellbeing and self-care in general – it impacts every part of person's life, makes your life better. In one Instagram post self-love was framed as the foundation to everything in life. In another the poster wanted to encourage people to show some self-love, and comment what they love about themselves and tag a friend to do the same. Responses were for example being strong, hardworking, caring and kind.

As noted, self-love is something that isn't easy to come by but can be practiced, as the below illustration demonstrates. Ellie said that if she notices herself saying something negative about herself, she tries to think of three things she loves about herself. She said that when she first started to practice self-love she would look at the mirror and pretend to like what she saw, and eventually the pretense came to be reality. Elena also said that looking at oneself in a mirror and saying "I love you" is something a lot of people can't do. Lena and Hannah however joked about the same thing – that the way to self-love is not looking oneself in a mirror and saying "I love you", that that only feels uncomfortable. Mia said that self-love needs to be practiced, because it can fade when

Image courtesy of © Dani DiPirro / PositivelyPresent.com

people are easily influenced by societal pressures. She mentioned that as children we are very happy and love ourselves but growing older it fades with the harmful influences from media. Now self-love is a life-long journey.

Empowerment

Self-help discourse, with its focus on individualism and problems that are to be solved within the self, is often seen as apolitical in nature. Both problems and answers are to be found in the individual, providing choices but also responsibilities. Changing things at a societal level can be framed as also beginning with the self. Self-care discourse also focuses on the self – on caring for the self, loving the self and accepting the self. Political opportunities for change aren't discussed much, but when they are, it is usually focused on women's rights and roles. As discussed, self-care and self-love content often sees that society purports harmful images of women. In self-care discourse counter narratives are formed against these ideas of the ideal woman that is thin, fit and constantly productive. Body positivity focuses on the way all bodies are good bodies. Body neutrality, that Ellie mentioned, is about diminishing the value of how the body looks all together. Self-love is about loving all parts of the self, as a quote said – even the parts no one claps for (Rudy Francisco). These concepts are often accompanied by a personal story on Instagram. Someone talks about their story – how they realized that

they needn't look a certain way to be happy or how they learned to love their self – and when this individual's story is tagged with #selflove or #bodypositivity it adds to the growing number of such accounts. These are counternarratives that begin with the individual but with a social media where anyone can post have the potential to spread. Giddens' concept of life politics, a politics that is about choice, is relevant here. Instagrammers choose lifestyles where they focus on self-actualization through choosing certain ways of living and conceptualizing their lives. Ethical questions of how to live are embedded in life politics. Political issues stem from these "processes of self-actualization", where projects on the self and influences of globalization are interconnected. (Giddens 1991:214–15.)

Self-care and self-love were also spoken of in terms of power and empowerment. In one post it was said that loving oneself can in itself be a way to revolt against a system that markets off beliefs that one isn't enough. Challenging forms of power can be done in daily life through one's habits of caring for and loving the self (see Giddens 1991:216). These two quotes also address self-love and self-care in ways that resemble Lorde's famous quote.

> "Self-care is how you take your power back."-Lalah Delia

> "Self love is the greatest middle finger of all time."

Thus in self-care discourse social change can be seen to start with the individual, similarly as to in self-help discourse. It is often said in self-care discourse that caring for the self benefits all aspects of life. It could be assumed that it could then enable initiating social change as well. Through social media channels, spreading awareness and sharing one's story are also ways to reach others and bring up one's opinion. Through this sharing, an individual story has the potential to become part of the social.

Mia and Ellie told me how their Instagram page started out as focusing on body image, but has grown into themes of self-care, self-love, acceptance and woman empowerment. They both talked of how much the page had influenced them themselves. In regards to women empowerment Mia and Ellie said how through sharing content on women that have done great things (they share these posts on "Woman Crush Wednesdays"), they have realized how incredible women are and how willing they are to help others, which they found touching. Mia said that "it's sort of a movement".

When more political themes were brought up in the Instagram discussions I observed, it usually had to do with human rights and specifically women's rights. In the summer of 2019 when I was doing my fieldwork, the big debate on abortion rights was going on in the US and this was visible in Instagram posts in the self-care arena as well. Posts bearing legends such as "your body, your choice" and a drawing of a female body with the saying that it is not property of the government, made a clear stance. Ellie said that when this was going on in the in the US, she considered doing a post on abortion rights, but decided not to. She and Mia had shared a post on Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez on one of their Woman Crush Wednesdays and received very hateful comments that were mostly from white men, that were directed at the politician herself. Ellie and Mia related how this was very bizarre to them, since they usually receive such kind comments and for instance heart emojis from people. However, even though Ellie didn't end up posting about abortion rights, both women agreed that they still want to speak up about these kinds of subjects. Staying silent is exactly what certain people hope to gain by nasty comments. Mia added that she's especially interested in women's rights in developing nations and has posted about such subjects, and people should thus be aware of their stance towards these issues and they'd prefer they didn't follow them if they disagree. Ellie agreed, saying that they can always turn off the comments if they get too much backlash. This is something one American Instagrammer did after sharing a pro-choice illustration on her page – she said that she turned off comments since she is not obliged to have a debate about abortion with people.

These examples show that the political is not completely absent from self-care discourse. When the political was brought up, it was usually to do with women's rights, though some posts about climate change came up as well. In general, social change was seen to be made by posting about loving and accepting oneself exactly as one is, against the way societal pressures and marketing are seen to attempt to make women feel unworthy, in order to sell beauty products or conform to certain roles.

5.3 Social media community

In this last section on relationships between the self and others, I turn to the community aspect of Instagram, a *social* media. This portion is also more about the *form* of self-care discourse. In the former chapter women spoke of the ways societal influences and pressures on their appearance have affected them, making them feel like they should look a certain way. Mia speculated on her own teenage years which were very difficult

in spite of the fact that there wasn't a social media then in the same way there is now. Yet my interviewees participate actively in the same social media they see as part of the problem of creating expectations and pressures towards women. Of course, as my research materials have shown, self-care discourse is about creating narratives to counter these mainstream ideas of what an ideal woman should look like or what kinds of emotions are normal.

Pros and cons of social media

In our discussions, my interviewees brought up both good things and negative aspects about social media. The negative aspects of social media are those partly discussed in the previous chapter: putting pressure on women especially in terms of their looks, concentrating only on women's looks and not other aspects such as their intelligence. Donna identified the amount of marketing on Instagram playing into the societal pressures discussed earlier. However, she thought that the upside of Instagram compared to other social media is that it's easy to follow and unfollow people. She can choose to follow people who post uplifting things, and not people who have very different beliefs from hers. Ellie said the same: she finds it important to unfollow accounts that make you feel bad about yourself and use social media channels to create a positive space for oneself. Donna compared Instagram to Facebook where she feels obligated to keep following people like family members, and where people share news that affect her mood negatively. Instagram is thus a space to create a certain social media bubble and only follow things that bring oneself joy.

Donna thinks that there is also a question of mindset with social media, since if someone is already depressed, being too much on social media can make it worse. Elena also said that social media is addictive, and one can get too concerned about people liking one's content or commenting and comparing oneself too much with others. Donna also noted that it's important to not get caught up in how many followers one has. Elena said that her younger sister has this problem of getting too hung up on social media, while having mental health issues and she has told her to take a break from social media until she feels better about herself. Lena also mentioned having read that depression and anxiety have increased since the internet has been on the rise. She says that it's problematic, because on the one hand social mead offers connection, but on the other, people often lack true connection and are isolated or compare themselves to

others. Comparison to others on social media is also something Mia and Ellie talked about as being the most problematic aspect of it.

Image courtesy of Matilda @crazyheadcomics

The potential harmful influence of social media was also adressed directly on Instagram – so within a social media as the above image illustrates. Here the reader is directly alerted in their activity of scrolling images on Instagram to stop for a moment. The reader is advised to reflect whether social media is bad for their mental health, makes them unhappy or compare themselves to others. In the caption text of the person who reposted this image, they speak of how social media only highlights certain parts of people's lives, yet we compare ourselves to these images. Another post had similar advice – a text with the heading of "self-care tip" urged people to unfollow Instagram accounts that make them feel like they should be someone else. Another one reminded people to make sure that they are not only "happy" on Instagram, but in real life. One post challenged readers to check in on themselves as many times as they check their social media.

The positive aspects my interviewees recognized in social media were to do with connection with like-minded people and finding information. Elena said that in participating in social media you feel part of a community and are able to share your opinions and find connections with people who have similar ideas. Ellie said that a

reason they started their Instagram page with Mia was the negative aspects of social media, such as comparing themselves to others, and wanting to create something that's positive and uplifting. Lena and Hannah had a similar idea: they wanted to raise awareness and spread the word on topics that aren't talked about enough. They see Instagram as especially good for this purpose.

> "For me Instagram it's connected, it feels like a platform were you can individualize your content and you can reach out to people on a basis where it feels like light entertainment, however, you can bring across a message that is important without people needing to concentrate for say 20 minutes in a YouTube video." (Zita)

Hannah spoke of the way the increasing numbers of people talking about certain topics is one of the biggest pros of social media. She brought up as an example how before the internet homosexuals couldn't necessarily connect with others as easily and know that what they are feeling is felt by others and is normal. When it comes to wellness, Hannah spoke of how people can learn new things and get different ideas from social media content, such as the idea that meditating for ten minutes might help calm them down. Social media brings the thoughts of so many more people into one's reach than the people a person would encounter in their lives otherwise, through friends and peers. Dani also talked of the way social media has helped people open up about certain topics that have been considered taboo, such as anxiety and depression. The more people talk about these things, the more others can recognize they might have similar experiences. This was already noted earlier in the thesis: taking care of mental health is an aspect of self-care that is especially discussed on Instagram and reducing the stigma around mental health issues is deemed as particularly important. One commenter on Instagram summarizes these views of social media, saying that it can be positive or negative, depending on how people use it, and said that we should stop comparing ourselves to others.

The form of self-care posts

The way self-care is discussed in Instagram has certain characteristics. Especially prominent when comparing to what is shared on Instagram in general, is that a large part of self-care posts are in the form of text. This text can be a quote from someone such as an author or the poster themselves, tips on self-care activities (such as in the post from my interviewee Katrina's Instagram page) or sometimes accompanied by illustrations, reminders, advice and encouragement.

In addition to the post, people also often write caption texts on Instagram. In self-care posts, this is often where the meaning of the shared post is elaborated on, or where the poster might share their personal experience related to the message of the post. This is often also where the poster initiates conversation around the topic at hand. In the caption of the below post Katrina asked her audience whether they have other good tips to share on morning self-care activities.

Image courtesy of Katrina Leggins, @knicolewriting

The sharing of reminders is a significant part of self-care posting on Instagram. Reminders can be about what to do – such as remembering to take care of oneself first – or about how to relate to the self. Reminders for action included reminding to take time off, to rest and say no, to self-care and to check in with oneself. Some are very concrete, as one post urging the reader to check in the moment whether they are holding tension in their bodies and then their drop shoulders, unclench the jaw and hands and take a deep breath. Many reminders declared their purpose with phrases beginning with variations of "This is your daily reminder to…", "morning/Monday etc. reminder" or "Friendly reminder that.." , "You are..", "It's okay to…" or a simple headline of "Reminder". Another form of reminders is posts giving permission, such as "You have permission to put yourself first." and "You have permission to rest." Commenters would thank for the tips and sometimes thank the poster for the "permission".

Many reminders were about relating to the self with kindness. One post reminded readers that they are not a failure or letting anyone down, that they are strong and special. Another simply stated that "You are good enough". Others reminded people to be kind to themselves, remember to take time off that they're allowed to change, they're beautiful, deserve to be happy, their feelings matter, they're prefect as they are, their voice matters, and that it's okay to prioritize their own needs. Resting and taking time off were in general reminded of often, and not always needing to be productive. One post stated that "Inner peace is the new success". The reminder of doing one's best doesn't mean working oneself to the point of a mental breakdown is especially telling of how relationships of work and private life are perceived in current society. Cederström and Spicer criticize the way wellbeing and work intersect – that there is an obligation to be fit for work, using free time to cultivate personal wellbeing for the ultimate goal of being more productive. In self-care discourse rest is especially valued and talked of.

Advice is also distributed widely in self-care discussions. Some of the most prominent areas of advice-giving have already been discussed earlier in the thesis. These include concrete tips for self-care practices, also specifically coping with the mental aspect of self-care and mental illnesses, as well as advice on relationships, such as setting boundaries with others. In social media channels anyone can share advice based on their experience, but it is interesting that personal experience is in fact also a part of self-help authorship. Woodstock notes that in self-help also, authors "construct their authority based on personal narratives of self-transformation" (Woodstock 2007:321) Grodin noted that the self-help readers she interviewed saw personal experience as a requirement for "competent self-help book authorship" (Grodin 1991:412). Personal experiences are understood to be especially meaningful in therapeutic culture, providing validity to advise others.

Quotes are also widely shared. Sometimes these are from authors, sometimes by the posters themselves. Quotes also often circulate on various social media accounts, sometimes in slightly different forms. I asked my interviewees why they think quotes are shared a lot on Instagram and why they themselves share them. Elena said that this is probably because they are easy to remember, give one something to think about and can give new insights. Mia and Ellie felt that quotes are easy to interpret into fitting various situations people might be in. This is similar to what was noted in studies of

self-help readership – people interpret self-help messages based on their own circumstances.

There are certain metaphors and styles of talking that are used often in self-care discourse. This was also visible in illustrations, that are used quite a lot in conveying self-care ideas. Dani, who is an illustrator and shares her experiences as well as tips on aspects of wellbeing, said that she finds the combination of visual images and inspirations an effective way to reach her audiences. Many illustrations on self-care are colorful drawings, with text accompanying image. Posts with only text often have certain colors and fonts, or a template that is used, distinguishing the creator of the post. This is visible in Katrina's post above. This makes sure that the creator is credited if the post is reposted by others. Many color schemes were used in posts, with the simplest ones in black and white, sometimes simply a screenshot from Twitter. Some styles were distinctly feminine, with pinks and whites. Some posts or caption texts also began with addresses such as "hey ladies" that clearly point to the assumption that readers will be women. The theme of "growing" was illustrated with flowers and plants. Two illustrations had a drawing of a girl with flowers sprouting from their heads, one with a text saying to let good thoughts grow, the other with a watering can and text "take care of yourself". Economy-related metaphors were also used, such as "If it costs you your peace it's too expensive." In one caption text the number of seconds a person has in a day was likened to having the same amount of dollars in the bank. It was said that people are credited a certain amount of money each day which is taken out each night. The post urged people to use every second, investing it towards health and happiness. Humor was also used, such as in this post:

> "Cancelling plans is OK. Ordering enough face masks to last you the entire year is OK. Spending hours looking at dogs on Instagram is OK. It's called self-care." (Bumble)

Communication

Self-help readers in Grodin's, Lichterman's and Simonds' studies felt a sense of community with other self-help readers, even though they didn't necessarily ever meet In the internet age, self-care enthusiasts don't only need to imagine a community, they can easily find one online. No matter where one lives, if there is internet, there is a possibility of participating in discussions.

In Instagram there are a few ways to communicate. Channels of communication are posting images and accompanying them with text (which is the basic function of Instagram), commenting on these posts and sending direct messages (DM) to another person or people. There is also the "stories"-function where it's possible to for instance have a livestream where people can send in questions in real time or just share a picture or a videoclip that people can then comment on through DM. These "stories" expire within 24 hours (unless they are saved in the account profile) and are usually more casual, less thought out than actual posts. Direct messages are private chats, commenting on posts is public on public accounts. In my fieldwork I concentrated on regular posts, though I did sometimes browse through "stories" from the accounts I followed and saved some of them. For observing interaction on Instagram, the "stories" posts don't really work, since the comments people might make on them are via direct message to the poster and not visible to others.

There are some general observable patterns in the ways people comment on Instagram posts. In the self-care arena posts are usually in the form of text, possibly with accompanying illustration, as noted in the previous section. This means that comments are usually directly related to the message in the post and or the caption text. Commenting on posts can be done in many ways. The quickest one is simply "liking" the post. The number of likes a specific post had was visible when I was conducting my research. Now Instagram has changed this feature so that the number of likes is only visible to the person whose post it is. In writing a comment, the simplest way is with an emoji, such as a heart of thumbs up. Sometimes only an emoji is shared, sometimes it's accompanied with a few words. These are often along the lines of "Thank you", "I needed this today", "Yes!" "Love this", "So true" and "Amen". Most comments on self-care posts are positive in tone, whether they are in the form of words or emojis or a combination of the two. These kinds of short messages seem to signify to the person who posted that their message was read and appreciated, and that the commenter agrees with the poster.

Longer comments may reveal more about the person's own life situation or thoughts that the post made them reflect upon. Sometimes this is in the forms of questions about how an idea put forward by the poster might relate to their situation. Sometimes just telling something about their lives that's related to the topic at hand. Some posts are initially in the form of questions, such as "What's your self-care routine?" or with a list

entitled “How to feel better?” following a question “What would you add to the list?” Answers to these questions are then shared on the comments. Some commenters also ask follow-up questions about the topics at hand, that are sometimes answered by the original poster, sometimes others. Quite often commenters simply comment on whatever the topic at hand is, with the comment directed at the poster or no one in particular. Ellie said that one time she asked people on Instagram to say something they are proud of about themselves and got many responses from people, saying that it feels exciting to have people share something about themselves. Mia added that the people who responded would have thought about the answer and thus took a moment to think about something nice about themselves, which would have added a little positive in their day.

> “I feel like a lot of people relate because they comment and interact with us, they send us messages like ‘hey like how did you get to this point of loving yourself’ and obviously we’re not experts so we can only speak to our own experience but it feels so amazing when people reach out in that way. I never thought that would be a thing that happens.” (Ellie)

Other people are also “tagged” into posts in the comments, and thus the commenter can share something interesting they found in a post with a friend, who gets a notification of this tagging. Mia and Ellie said that they find it nice to see someone tag a friend in one of their posts, that they feel a connection they want to share. Social circles around self-care discussions can thus be of people who don’t really know each other, but comment on the same posts and are interested in the same topics, and on the other hand people who bring people that are part of their lives into certain discussions.

All of my interviewees were happy to have interaction on their pages. However, they also thought that it isn’t necessary about the quantity of followers, but about their messages being understood by even one person that is considered more important. Dani said the reason she shares her experiences is that others could share in her learning process. Sharing on social media makes it possible to connect with others that have been through similar things and bring something positive to people’s lives. Mia also said that it’s an amazing feeling to see people connect with something she and Ellie posted on Instagram, that their page can be a safe place to express feelings. Sharing messages that are perceived to be important can be a way of connecting to a larger purpose in life, which Fischer found to be an important part of wellbeing. Affecting other people’s lives through social media can bring meaning to one’s own life. People can help each other,

lift up each other and share experiences. This aspect of connection, community and sharing is a vital part of self-care discussions.

Sharing your story, constructing yourself

Though communication is a key aspect of social media, my interviewees related that their social media pages had been beneficial for them themselves. Mia and Ellie described how they have found posting things about self-love, self-care and acceptance on their account as having helped themselves. Mia started to better realize how she was treating herself and speaking to herself. Ellie said that she has learned to understand herself better and challenge some negative thoughts she had about herself. The Instagram page was also a vital part of her starting to love herself. She said that through sharing content on self-love, it in a way forced her to pretend that she likes herself. Eventually the pretending turned into reality. Both Mia and Ellie said that they find it scary to share their personal lives on the internet but find that this sharing is part of healing.

> "I think if you can share it's a big step in your healing and it can help other people in their healing as well and that's really all you can hope to do is if your bad times can be turned into something good." (Mia)

Mia said that she never thought she would find healing from posting something on the internet, but this is what has happened. Anne said that she started her blog when she realized that she had some feelings and thoughts she thought she had let go of, but in fact hadn't, and these feelings and thoughts needed some place to go. She decided to blog about it, thinking that she is doing it primarily for herself but thought that maybe someone could read it and see that even though bad things happen, some positive can come out of it. Elena also said that if she notices herself getting to caught up on how many people have liked her posts, she reminds herself that it doesn't manner, she is posting for herself. Elena said that sharing personal things can make her feel a little vulnerable but feels it's important to show people that even though she might be stressed or feel down, she has made it through. Sharing one's lives with their ups and downs is about letting others know that it is normal for life to be more than perfect Instagram pictures, and that people go through difficult things and come to the other side.

Social media can serve as a site for what Giddens terms "the reflexive project of the self" in late modernity, where the self is created through sustaining biographical

narratives (Giddens 1991:5). Constructing a narrative of the self is way of understanding the lifespan, giving it coherence in a world of constant changes and choices (1991: 215).

> "The narrative of self-identity has to be shaped, altered and reflexively sustained in relation to rapidly changing circumstances of social life, on a local and global scale." (Giddens 1991: 215).

Through sharing their own lives through these aspects of self-care and self-love, these women are constructing themselves through narrative. This narrative is focused on the individual journey and healing from the harm of societal pressures, to caring for oneself and loving oneself. In writing and sharing these accounts of themselves, these women are countering narratives of what a woman should look and be like. By talking of their personal stories, including hardships, these women are constructing themselves in social media in a specific way. Mental health issues are normalized as part of life, and an idea of always needing to be productive is countered. Life is framed as an individual journey that has its ups and downs. These Instagrammers want to remind others that though life can be difficult at times, it gets easier, and caring for the self is a vital part of living a good life. Simultaneously they are reminding themselves. The project of the self is a reflexive one, as Giddens says. People are in a constant state of becoming; learning to love oneself and care for oneself first.

6. Conclusions

In this thesis I set out to examine self-care discourse on the social media site Instagram. I was interested in what this specific discourse on wellbeing can reveal about conceptions of selfhood, others and society, and conceptions of what constitutes a good life in current Western society. Questions of wellbeing are not only questions of what an individual does to maintain it, but also about wider ethical ideas of what is seen to constitute a good life. The way individuals relate to the self and others in self-care discussions can reveal aspects of what is perceived to be important in in these relationships. The way answers to these questions are framed in online discourse reflects changes at wider cultural and social levels.

In this thesis I have looked at the conception of the self in self-care as part of Euro-American tradition of understanding selfhood. I trace the selfhood in self-care discourse as a continuation of the ways caring for the self was practiced in Antiquity and early Christianity, to the impact of Calvinism in the way work is valued and American

originating ideas of positive thinking and self-help. Self-care is part of therapeutic culture, where psychological concepts are used to understand various phenomena in society. Empirical studies on self-help literature informed my investigations and provided a comparative framework to self-care discourse.

I presented two main avenues of analysis of therapeutic culture in the thesis. First, Foucauldian inspired critical views of self-help and wellness culture as forms of neoliberal governance, where individuals are made into subjects aligning with values of autonomy, self-improvement, and self-responsibility. In analysis of self-help books, it was the content of books that was analyzed in such works. The other main branch of analysis looks at how self-help manuals are interpreted by readers. Though the content of a self-help book may be seen as purporting values of self-reliance and autonomy, readers interpret books messages according to their personal and cultural circumstances and don't read them as single truths, but as manuals that can give nuggets of insight into their own experiences. The individual-focused messages of self-help manuals can provide people agency, even if they don't provide avenues for social change.

In my research into self-care, both of these views – therapeutic technologies as a form of neoliberal governance, and on the other hand as tools in projects of self-making that provide a sense of agency – remained valuable. If we assume that "there is no selfhood apart from the collaborative practice of its figuration" and that selves are constructed in interaction that is culturally informed, I argue that social media self-care discourse is one avenue for such figuration of selfhood (Battaglia 1995:2)

Fieldwork conducted on Instagram was informed by several research questions that have been attempted to be answered in this thesis. The analysis sections of the thesis were divided into two larger wholes, with the first addressing questions focused on the individual self and the second on how relationships between the self and others and society are framed in social media self-care discourse. The way self-care is understood in current self-care discussions, how it is practiced and why, was addressed in the first section. I identified two key aspects in the ways self-care is defined: mindset and practice. Though self-care is a practice and ideas for self-care practices circulate Instagram widely, what was deemed to determine something as self-care was the mindset it was done in. The self-care mindset is about a specific way of relating to the self. The self and relationship towards oneself are highly valued and the self is framed

as a prime source of knowledge for the individual. Taking care of oneself thus entails listening to oneself, what the self needs, and acting accordingly in the practice of the self. Self-knowledge was a requisite for the practice of self-care, but increased self-knowledge was also the result of caring for the self. Foucault noted how for the Greeks self-knowledge was also the consequence of self-care. Technologies of the self as defined by Foucault are about transforming the self, one's "bodies and souls, thoughts, conduct, and way of being" in order to gain states of happiness, wisdom, and in current self-care practices better general wellbeing (Foucault 1988a:18). My interviewees related that they had found better awareness of themselves, self-knowledge, through their self-care practices, that had increased their wellbeing and especially mental health.

Self-care practices were often categorized, to make it easier to care for all parts of the self. The major categories of mind, body and spirit align with Western understandings of the self. Other categories of care self-care is further divided into are fluid and differ between individuals. Though the self is categorized in this sense, it is also viewed as a whole, where everything is connected. Practices such as mediation are perceived to benefit both mind and body. Similarly running was often categorized as physical self-care. However, it also helped with anxiety so it could be categorized into mental self-care as well. Social self-care was sometimes categorized as a part of mental self-care. These categories are intertwined and interconnected. They are however helpful in listening to what the self needs. Of these categories of care and health the self is divided into, caring for mental health is especially discussed on Instagram. Though caring for all parts of the self is understood to be important, mental health and illnesses are perceived to not be discussed enough in society in general and are therefore highlighted in self-care social media discussions. The stigma related to having mental health issues or illnesses is countered by Instagrammers who share their experiences regarding mental health. Mental health issues and negatively perceived emotions are normalized as being part of the human experience. Societal norms are thus questioned and attempted to alter by sharing personal narratives, information, and advice related to mental health.

The second larger whole of the thesis concentrated on the ways sociality and society is present in self-care discourse. Though self-care discourse is individualistic, the social is not at all absent from these discussions. The individual is seen to be embedded in social relationships and obligations. However, sociality is often presented more as a problem than a solution to individual wellbeing. Social relationships are looked at through the

individual's needs, as something that is managed by the individual. The concept of boundaries was often used in discussing social relationships. Good relationships are understood to be between individuals, who have clear senses of boundaries and take care of and love themselves first, before others. Happiness and wellbeing are to be found within, not from others. There is an ethical duty towards caring for the self *first*. This was also framed as the best way to take care of others. This was especially relevant in posts directed at women who are mothers. Taking care of oneself was framed as the best way to care for one's family as well.

Western society is seen as stressful, fast-paced and taxing in many self-care discussions. There are ample opportunities for people, but also a lot of information, responsibilities, and expectations towards people in life, both at work and outside of it. This is similar as in studies of self-help books, where current Western society was framed as burdening the individual. Self-help offers solutions of finding one's "authentic self" that is outside the harmful socialization of modern society. In self-care discourse the solutions to the stress of society are also individual. Priority is put on listening to the self, being aware of what the self needs and taking care of the self. The ways this is done is often suggested to be through slowing down, resting and taking time for oneself. Ways of coping with the taxation of modern lives are to be found in self-care. Caring for oneself *first* counters the idea that people should always be productive. Wellbeing is framed as something that people deserve for themselves, not as something that is required to survive in the capitalist system. Self-care was seen as benefitting all aspects of people's lives. Caring for the self cannot however be completely divorced from power relations. Biopower, where power works through regulation of life and norms can to some extent be conceived of in self-care discussions as well. Work is part of people's lives and self-care can be done at work too. However, my interviewees also related times of choosing their mental health or family over work obligations. Self-care discourse is also an arena of negotiating certain norms around selfhood in Western society. Thought the individual is framed as self-sufficient and bounded, conversations especially around mental health and body positivity counter norms of what it means to be human in modern society and counter a need to always be productive.

Through sharing personal experiences, Instagrammers construct their self-identities in ways that are informed by self-care discourse and are in opposition to specific ideals of the productive, efficient and always happy individual. Instagram self-care discussions

are an arena of self-making, but these discussions also work at a wider level to build narratives of new "normals" in society at large and in this way, social media discussions on caring for the self can also provide avenues of social change through the sharing of these individual narratives. In self-help studies it is often seen that the individual discourse of self-help moves people away from finding political solutions to problems and bring individuals back on themselves. Though social or political change is not the main subject of discussion in self-care channels, social issues were sometimes brought up especially in terms of women's rights, which at the time of research was focused on abortion rights. Women's roles such as motherhood or objectification of women in media were also countered by the simple proclamation of caring for oneself and loving oneself before anyone else. Giddens' term "life politics" describes this politics of lifestyle choices, where choosing to live in a certain way has impact. For the Greeks living a beautiful life using the arts of existence was only for free adult males. Now it is especially women who cultivate themselves through caring for the self, to gain health and wellbeing.

In summary, self-care, as observed in Instagram discourse, is a practice that is based on a mindset of love and care towards the self. Self-care practices vary according to the individual, and are often categorized into physical, mental and spiritual self-care, of which taking care of mental health is especially discussed on Instagram. Self-care is practiced in order to gain health and wellbeing. Knowledge of the self is an important aspect in self-care. The mindset that makes a practice self-care is based on awareness of the self and what the self needs and caring for the self also leads to increased self-knowledge. Caring for the self is understood as an ethical practice that benefits the individual but also others, and is framed as a requisite to caring for others. A good mother, for instance, is someone who cares for herself first. Social relationships are looked at from the point of view of the individual. Society is framed as being taxing and too focused on productivity. Societal pressures on appearances and conforming to certain roles are especially felt by women. Instagram self-care discussions work to counter an idea of an ideal woman, who gives her everything to her work and family, while conforming to specific ideals of beauty. Openly discussing mental health and sharing personal stories, as well as reminding others to rest and take care of themselves first are ways to provide ideas of alternative ways of living. Sharing one's experience on social media is also a way of constructing the self through narrative. This narrative is

of a woman who is an individual, takes care of herself and loves herself first, and whose life is a journey of healing. Living a good life is about taking care of oneself first, so one can be there for others.

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